A

PARAPHRASE

AND

COMMENT

UPON THE

Epistles and Gospels,

Appointed to be Used in the

Church of *ENGLAND*

ON ALL

SUNDAYS and HOLY-DAYS

Throughout the Year.

Designed to excite Devotion, and to promote the Knowledge and Practice of Sincere Piety and Virtue.

VOL. I.

Beginning with the First Sunday in Advent.

By GEORGE STANHOPE, D. D.
Late Dean of *Canterbury*.

The NINTH EDITION.

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MDCCLXXV.

TO THE

KING'S

MOST EXCELLENT

MAJESTY.

SIR,

THIS Work had Ten Years ago the Honour of making its first Appearance in the World under the Patronage of Your Majesty's most Pious Royal Predecessor. I did then think it my Duty to excite, in all its Readers, a thankful and just Regard, for the very highly valuable Blessing of a Protestant Succession to these Kingdoms, established in your Majesty's most Illustrious House. I do now, with the same Thankfulness, adore that Wisdom and Goodness of the Divine Providence, which hath placed Your Majesty on the Throne, with all the Demonstrations of a General Joy, and United Affections, that any Whole People are capable of giving to any Successor.

If among these I also presume to welcome Your Majesty with the humble Offering of a Book, composed at first, and now again published, for the Ad-

vancement of Virtue and Religion in general, and for the ſake of doing Juſtice to the Offices of that particular Church, which now reveres your Majeſty, as its ſupreme Governor and mighty Defender: Your Princely Goodneſs will not I hope diſdain to countenance this poor, but unfeigned Teſtimony of my Zeal, for the Honour and Service of God, of the Church, and of your Majeſty. A Zeal, which will conſtantly exert itſelf in earneſt Prayers for your Long Life and Peaceful Reign; for the Stability of your Throne in your Royal Deſcendants; and for All, that can make you Glorious and Happy in this World, and in a Better.

I am,

May it pleaſe your Majeſty,

with the profoundeſt Duty

and Deference,

Your Majeſty's moſt Devoted,

moſt Faithful, and

moſt Obedient Humble

Servant and Chaplain,

September 22, 1714.

George Stanhope.

TO THE

QUEEN's

MOST

Excellent Majeſty.

May it pleaſe Your Sacred Majeſty,

THAT this Undertaking preſumes to beg your Majeſty's Gracious Acceptance, and the Patronage of Your Royal Name, is not from any Confidence the Author entertains, of the Perfection of the Work; but purely from a Senſe of Your Majeſty's ready Inclination to countenance and promote every Good Deſign.

For, Madam, the Ends intended to be ſerved by the following Treatiſe, are, Inſtructing Your People in the Principles, and exciting them to the Practice, of true Religion: Aſſiſting them with Proper Meditations, at the Solemn Seaſons of approaching GOD in his Publick Wor-

ſhip: Employing their Thoughts upon Paſſages of Scripture, which prove and explain our Common Chriſtianity, and diſpoſe to Piety, and Virtue, and Peace: And particularly making them duly ſenſible how wiſe and profitable a Choice, for theſe Purpoſes, Our Excellent Liturgy hath made, in the Yearly Courſe of Epiſtles and Goſpels. And, to admit any manner of Doubt, whether ſuch Deſigns as Theſe, ſhall obtain Your Majeſty's Protection and Favour, were great Ingratitude, greatly Injurious to the Piety and Goodneſs of ſuch a Queen.

All We, who have the Honour of Waiting at the Altar, do juſtly eſteem it our unſpeakable Happineſs, that our holy Exhortations from the Pulpit, and the Preſs, are ſo powerfully recommended by a Royal Example. For, What greater Satisfaction hath any Good Man to wiſh, in this World, than to ſee the pure Doctrine of the beſt of Churches exemplified and adorned by the beſt of Princes? 'Tis thus Your Majeſty proves, beyond

yond all Contradiction, that Zeal and Affection for our Eſtabliſhment, which You have been pleaſed ſo often, and ſo ſolemnly, to declare, to the Comfort and Joy of all that love our *Sion*. 'Tis thus Your Practice deſervedly reproaches the too many, who are liberal in their Profeſſion of Loving Her, but neglect to give the like Evidence of their Sincerity. 'Tis thus that You (it ought to be preſumed) will influence Them to better Conſideration, who, did they rightly underſtand, could not forbear to love Her.

This Glory (we hope) is reſerved for Your Majeſty's Reign; to triumph over Tyranny and Oppreſſion abroad; and, (which is yet a nobler Victory) over Vice and Diviſion at Home.

Of ſo vaſt Importance to This Church and Nation, to the Proſperity of *Europe*, and to the Advancement of Virtue and Religion, is that moſt precious Life; Which, that Almighty GOD in his Mercy would prolong, and ſweeten with

Epiſtle Dedicatory.

Health, and all poſſible Bleſſings upon Your Majeſty's Perſon, and Your Royal Conſort: That the Happineſs of you Both may be as eminently Great, as your mutual Affection and Princely Qualities, are Conſpicuous and Exemplary, is the conſtant and earneſt Prayer of,

May it pleaſe your Majeſty,

Your Majeſty's moſt Devoted,

moſt Obedient,

and moſt Humble Servant,

George Stanhope.

THE

THE PREFACE.

I Think myself obliged to premise somewhat very briefly, as well concerning the Subject treated of in the following Work, as concerning the Nature and Design of the Work itself: That so my Reader, before his Entrance upon the Book, may understand what he is to expect, and what Improvement, the Author hopes, may result from it.

The Subject treated of consists of those Collects, Epistles, and Gospels, which make a part of Divine Worship upon all solemn Days: in that, commonly called the Communion Service. A Service still in use, for the keeping up, or for instructing our People in the Reasons of, a more than ordinary regard to the Times thus distinguished. For, although the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper be not, cannot be now conveniently, (which yet it is much to be wished it could be, and were) administered so often in all our Congregations: That Omission ought not, however, to hinder the retaining so much of the Service, as the present Condition of Things allows. Especially, when this part is so particularly edifying, that it would very ill be spared in any such Assemblies; And that the Instituting of our Festivals and Fasts must needs signify very little without it.

The Collects, First, *seem to be so called, Either because some very material Passages of the Epistle, or Gospel, or Both, are here drawn so together, as either to lay the Foundation, or to make the Matter of the Petitions more especially proper for the Day: Or else, because several*

ral Requeſts are here compacted cloſe into one ſhort Form. And with Theſe I am no further concerned, than by Marginal References, to point out the Scriptures, whence they are taken. Some of which relate to the Things we aſk: Others expreſs the Ground upon which we aſk, or the Occaſion of aſking them at that time: All of them agree, in juſtifying theſe Prayers, in expoſing the Weakneſs of thoſe who ſuffer themſelves to be deluded, and the Diſingenuity of thoſe who go about to deceive the Vulgar, into a Diſlike of our Liturgy. And this, upon a frivolous Pretence of theſe Forms being taken out of the Romiſh *Maſs Book. Whereas the being found there neither is to Us, nor was any Inducement at all to our wiſe and pious Reformers heretofore. But they conſidered, that we ought to depart from the Corruptions only of that Church; And when theſe were entirely Corrected, or caſt off, they rightly judged, that it would have then argued a ſtrange, and even ſcandalous, Perverſeneſs, not to retain thoſe Parts or Offices, the Soundneſs whereof was evident, by their being either expreſly contained in, or undeniably founded upon, the Word of God himſelf.*

The Epiſtles, (for ſo the whole Collection of them is commonly called, taking its Denomination from the far greater Part,) are Portions of Scripture, chiefly conſiſting of Moral Precepts. Some few indeed muſt be excepted; which are either Paſſages Prophetical of our Bleſſed Saviour, with regard to his Firſt or Second Coming; Or elſe Hiſtorical, relating the memorable Acts of the Saints, whom the Church commemorates; Or Doctrinal, illuſtrating the Ends, and Advantages of our Lord's Actions or Sufferings. Amongſt thoſe Epiſtles (ſtrictly ſo called) ſome have a more immediate regard to Queſtions of great Importance, between the Jews and Chriſtians, at the time when they were written. Yet are they not ſo confined to the Controverſies then depending, but that they, at the ſame time, help to explain many eſſential Points and Privileges of our Religion: Such as

as are highly neceſſary to be underſtood, and capable of bringing Improvement to Ours, and to all Ages of the Church.

In treating of Theſe, I have made it my Endeavour to ſet forth, First, *their moſt Literal Senſe, in Agreement with the Occaſion, which the Writers ſeem to have had next in View. And afterwards, to deduce from thence ſuch Applications, as may render them of general Benefit, and ſhew Us our Concern in them. And, for the reſt, it has been my Care to enforce the Duties contained in them, with Arguments ſo ſuited to the Subject, That every Member of our Church may eaſily be convinced, how greatly thoſe among us are to blame, who lead vicious Lives: Eſpecially, how falſe the Pretence of Ignorance to do better, muſt needs be, when this ſhort Collection alone preſents them with ſo plain a Summary, ſo compleat a Body of Practical Religion.*

In the Goſpels we are furniſhed with the ſtrongeſt Evidences of our Faith. The Myſteries of our Lord's Incarnation and Nativity, The Miracles he wrought, The Parables he ſpoke, the holy Exhortations he has left us, whether in Publick Diſcourſes to the Multitudes, or in Private Conferences with his own Diſciples; The Hiſtory of his Life and Death, Reſurrection, and Aſcenſion into Heaven; The Promiſes of his Holy Spirit, and Predictions of the many wonderful Things, which his Followers, thus aſſiſted, ſhould be enabled to perform, in Confirmation of the Truth: Theſe, upon the matter, make up the Subſtance of this part of our Service. Which gives us a perfect Syſtem for the Eſtabliſhment of our Faith, as the Epiſtles have been obſerved to do, for the Direction of our Manners.

It were therefore heartily to be wiſhed, that the Excellency and Uſefulneſs of thoſe Scriptures, choſen for the Inſtruction and Edification of our People, were more generally laid to Heart: That Men were duly ſenſible of

the

the Happineſs of that Communion, in which ſuch effectual Care is taken for their Souls, that all who frequent our Publick Aſſemblies, are ſecure of being taught, even there, the whole of That, which is neceſſary to their Salvation. And I hope, I may take leave to recommend this (as I conceive) very reaſonable Inſtance of Modeſty and Prudence, that ſuch Deference may be paid to the Authority and Wiſdom of our Governors; as for our Flocks to make thoſe Paſſages of Scripture the Subject of their private Study and Meditation, which have been judged moſt proper for their Publick Inſtruction. For, although our Church do, as indeed She ought, indulge the Free Uſe of the whole Book of God to all her Children; and as liberally impart unto them, in the Courſe of daily Leſſons throughout the Year: Yet, ſince theſe Paſſages are ſingled out, for ſuch Times, as are ſuppoſed to draw the greateſt Numbers together; This, methinks, is a fair Intimation, and fit to be taken by the Generality of People, that ſuch Portions of the Bible are not only of ſingular Profit, when rightly underſtood; but that they are likewiſe beſt ſuited to the Capacities of Common Men; and conſequently, if attended to with Diligence and Honeſty, in leſs Danger of being miſunderſtood.

It is in order to render theſe publick Proviſions more effectual, and to aſſiſt Men in the more eſſential and uſeful Parts of Religion, that the following Treatiſe hath been compoſed and publiſhed. A Work indeed originally intended, for the more particular Service of an Excellent Young Prince. The prudent Methods of whoſe Education, though they were far from needing any Helps from ſo much meaner Hands; Yet did not make the Zeal of offering them ceaſe to be a Tribute due to his high Station, from every Lover of this Church and Country. God ſaw him quickly ripe for Heaven, and hath actually placed upon his Head a brighter and more durable Crown, than That, which awaited him in Reverſion here

here below. To His infinite Advantage, 'tis certain; though to the ſad Diſappointment of thoſe glorious Proſpects, which fed our Hopes of his Future Greatneſs, and our Happineſs in it. For, What indeed might we not be allowed to promiſe ourſelves, of Wiſdom and Virtue, and Goodneſs, and every Qualification, proper to a Princely, and a Chriſtian Mind; from a Genius ſo noble, a Capacity ſo large, Attainments ſo far above His tender Age, and, to ſay all in a Word, from the Son of ſuch Parents?

But God is wiſe and juſt in all his Counſels. And, bleſſed be his Mercy, which hath preſerved to us a Royal Mother: To the Number of whoſe Years, we hope, he will pleaſe to add the Proportion, wanting in the natural Courſe of her Son's. Nor muſt we forget to be truly thankful for the very valuable Bleſſing, of a Proteſtant Succeſſion to our Poſterity; when thoſe Years ſhall, as alas! at length they muſt, fail. So that our Excellent Church hath ſtill all the Security, that Human Appearances can give, of a firm and laſting Eſtabliſhment. The only Dangers, that ſeem to threaten us, ariſe from our Wickedneſs, and our Diviſions. The former would be effectually prevented, by improving thoſe Advantages to Devotion, and Piety, and all manner of Virtue, which (it is the Deſign of this Treatiſe to ſhew) are, in great Plenty, put into our Hands. The latter would be in good meaſure healed, would our Brethren of different Perſuaſions lay aſide their unreaſonable Prejudices ſo far, as to acquaint themſelves thoroughly with the true Chriſtian Spirit, the Wiſdom, the Uſefulneſs, the Seaſonableneſs, of our Publick Offices. To both which ends, ſo far as my preſent Concern reaches, ſomewhat, I am apt to believe, the following Diſcourſes may contribute; if they ſhall be allowed ſo much place, in the more retired Devotions of the Family, or the Cloſet; that each of them be made the Subject of Private Conſideration, on the reſpective Days of their being publickly

read

read in our Churches. This Method would always employ our Thoughts with Safety and Edification; and, upon all ſolemn Occaſions, will ſuggeſt ſuch things to our Minds, as are ſure to be ſeaſonable and proper, and leave good Impreſſions behind them.

In purſuance of my Deſign to render this Book uſeful to All, I have endeavoured that it may not be (juſtly) unacceptable to Any. Hence all the Modern Points of Controverſy are no where induſtriouſly enlarged upon. And, as oft as the Vindication of the Church's Honour hath made ſome little mention of any ſuch neceſſary; it hath been my conſtant Deſire to avoid all Offence, by treating Thoſe of a different Opinion, in ſuch a manner, as to intend the refuting of their Errors, but never the reproaching any Perſons, who lie under the Unhappineſs of being ſeduced into them.

When I firſt undertook this Work, it was in my Mind, to have explained particularly the Reaſons, and Uſages, of the ſeveral ſolemn Seaſons, ſet apart for Publick Devotion; As alſo, to have given ſome ſhort Account, of the Remains we have in Hiſtory, concerning thoſe Bleſſed Saints, whoſe Virtues we at ſet times commemorate, and of the Reaſonableneſs of paying this Honour to them. But, being in this Subject already prevented, by the pious Labours of a Learned and Worthy Friend; I ſhall contract my Thoughts of this kind, as Occaſions offer, and only hint ſo much as may be ſerviceable to the main Deſign of this Book: Which is, the expounding and improving the Portions of Scripture recommended to us on thoſe Occaſions.

Mr. *Nelſon* on the Feſtivals and Faſts.

I have done, after having adviſed my Reader, not to look for any Oſtentation of Nicety, or Eloquence, in the following Sheets; but ſuch a plain and familiar Style, as might make my Arguments moſt intelligible, and my Exhortations

portations grounded upon them, moſt affectionate, and moving. For the things I aim at, are, Becoming an Inſtrument of Good in the Function God hath called me to; Doing Juſtice to the pureſt and wiſeſt of Churches; And, as She in appointing, ſo I, in diſcourſing upon her Epiſtles and Goſpels, Seek the Profit of many, that they may be ſaved. *With this Mind, if the Reader do likewiſe take care to peruſe them, my End will not fail in good degree to be attained, nor the Bleſſing of God to reward his Pains. To whoſe Grace I moſt heartily recommend theſe poor unworthy Labours, and every One, into whoſe Hands they ſhall come: Beſeeching Him, to be preſent with all ſuch; and, by the inward Teachings of his Holy Spirit, to proſper whatſoever is contained, and to ſupply whatſoever is wanting here. That Peace and Love, Decency and Order, Union and Obedience,* Truth and Juſtice, Religion and Piety, *may flouriſh and abound more and more, to the* Advancement of his Glory, the Good of his Church, the Safety, Honour, and Welfare of Our Sovereign and Her Kingdoms: *And eſpecially, that the Practice of thoſe Virtues, and the Promotion of ſuch Happineſs on Earth, may bring many Souls to that Happineſs in Heaven, of which there ſhall be no End.* Amen.

THE

THE CONTENTS OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

A PA-

A

PARAPHRASE and COMMENT

Upon all the

Epiſtles and Goſpels,

Uſed throughout the Year.

The Firſt Sunday in Advent.

The COLLECT.

ALmighty God give us Grace, that we may caſt * away the Works of Darkneſs, and put upon us the Armour of Light, now in the Time of this mortal Life, (in which thy Son Jeſus Chriſt came to viſit us † in great Humility) that in the laſt Day, when he ſhall come again in his ‡ glorious Majeſty, to judge * both the quick and dead, we may riſe † to the Life immortal, through Him, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghoſt, now and ever. *Amen.*

* *Rom.* xiii. 12.
† *Phil.* ii. 7. *Matt.* xxi. 5.
‡ *Luke* xxi. 27.
* 2 *Tim.* iv. i.
† 1 *Theſ.* iv. 16, 17.
John ver. 29.

The EPISTLE.

Rom. xiii. 8. PARAPHRASE.

8. *OWE no Man any Thing but to love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the Law.*

8. Diſcharge the Duties of your reſpective Capacities ſo faithfully, that nothing be omitted, which any Relation, Natural or Civil, requires at your Hands. But know, there is ſtill one Duty of univerſal and perpetual Obligation. For Charity, even when it hath done moſt, is ever bound, and ever labouring, to do more: And this is ſo comprehenſive, that it does not only take in the Letter, but anſwers the Intent, of the whole Moral Law.

9. For the Law designs to prevent all Injuſtice to others; and the loving our Neighbour as ourſelves, does not only imply the doing him no Injury, but engages us to do him all the good we can.

9. *For this, thou ſhalt not commit Adultery, Thou ſhalt not kill, Thou ſhalt not ſteal, Thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs, Thou ſhalt not covet, and if there be any other Commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this Saying, namely, Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf.*

10. Thus the *Second* Table is effectually ſatisfied: And ſo indeed is the *Firſt* too; in regard the Chriſtian's Love of his Neighbour is inſeparable from, and founded upon, the Love of God.

10. *Love worketh no Ill to his Neighbour, therefore Love is the Fulfilling of the Law.*

11. And now to all our other Engagements to Juſtice and Charity, we ſhall do well to add that in particular, which ariſes from the Conſideration of our preſent Circumſtances. For the Condition of Chriſtians calls for higher Degrees of Goodneſs, than either the State of Natural Religion, or the Jewiſh Law. We have a clearer and leſs diſtant Proſpect of eternal Happineſs, than either they had, who lived before Chriſt's Coming, or than we ourſelves had at our firſt Converſion to the Faith.

11. *And that knowing the Time, that now it is high Time to awake out of Sleep, for now is our Salvation nearer than when we believed.*

12. Every Day brings this nearer to us, and it is not fit our Zeal ſhould abate, but much rather increaſe, in Proportion as our Hopes advance towards Enjoyment. Darkneſs and Ignorance are almoſt quite diſpelled by the Light of the Goſpel. Our Life of Sin and Error wears away apace; and a State of Glory and Perfection is approaching with Speed towards us. Thoſe ſcandalous Vices muſt therefore be abandoned, which will not endure the Light; and thoſe Virtues acquired and exerciſed, which may be, at once a Defence againſt Temptations, and an Ornament to our Profeſſion.

12. *The Night is far ſpent, the Day is at hand: Let us therefore caſt off the Works of Darkneſs, and let us put on the Armour of Light.*

13. Intemperance and Revelling, unlawful Pleaſures and unnatural Luſts, uncharitable Envyings and malicious Contentions, are Things that affect

13. *Let us walk honeſtly as in the Day, not in Rioting and Drunkenneſs, not in Chambering and Wantonneſs, not in Strife and Envying.*

affect Secrecy, and are attended with Shame. They cannot conſiſt with any due Regard to Modeſty and Decency, and all who commit them are induſtrious to conceal them.

14. *But put ye on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and make not Proviſion for the Fleſh, to fulfil the Luſts thereof.*

14. How then can theſe be in any Degree excuſeable in Chriſtians, who, at their Baptiſm, engage moſt ſolemnly to make the Purity of Jeſus Chriſt their conſtant Pattern; and his Virtues the Garb of their Souls, by which they ſhould be * as viſibly diſtinguiſhed, as Men commonly are by the Garments they wear? It is true, indeed, no Degree of Holineſs exempts a Man from the Neceſſities of Nature; and therefore ſome Proviſion muſt be made for theſe Mortal Bodies, while we carry them about us. But every good Man will be careful to reſtrain this Proviſion to the Relief of his Wants, and the Support of his Life, without making theſe a Pretence for extending it to the cheriſhing his Luſts, and gratifying the Extravagances of a ſenſual Appetite, by vain and luxurious Pleaſures.

* *Chryſ.*

COMMENT.

THE Deſign of this particular Seaſon, and of the Devotions proper to it, is ſufficiently intimated to us by this ſpecial Collect, to be the reminding Men of our Bleſſed Lord's Twofold Coming. The One already paſſed, when in *great Humility* he came to redeem us: The other ſtill Future, when *in his glorious Majeſty he ſhall come to judge us.* And the Epiſtle, now under Conſideration, recommends ſuch pious Diſpoſitions and Practices, as are the beſt Qualifications to prepare us, both for meeting him with Comfort at his Second, and for commemorating with due Decency and Devotion his Firſt, Advent. I ſhall therefore endeavour to edify my Reader, in the Virtues proper to theſe Purpoſes, by propoſing from this Portion of Scripture,

I. *Firſt*, The Duties which the Apoſtle here urges upon every Chriſtian: And,

II. *Secondly*, The Arguments made uſe of to enforce them.

I. The Duties are principally Two: Charity and Purity of Converſation. The former comprehends all that Branch of Virtue, which Divines uſually diſtinguiſh by our *Duty to our Neighbour:* And this is expreſſly commanded here. The latter denotes all that, which is frequently called our *Duty to ourſelves.* And this is the Importance of thoſe ſeveral Expreſſions, *Awaking out of Sleep, caſting off the Works of Darkneſs, putting on the Armour of Light, walking honeſtly as in the Day*, forſaking the Vices which are inconſiſtent with, and a Diſhonour to, a Chriſtian's holy Profeſſion; *putting on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and not making Proviſion for the Fleſh, to fulfil the Luſts thereof.*

Ver. 8, 9, 10.

Ver. 12, 13.

Ver. 14.

II. My Second Head will conſiſt of the Motives, by which the Apoſtle enforces theſe Duties: And They are likewiſe Two.

1. The Conſideration of their Suitableneſs to the Goſpel-State; which, in Compariſon of the former Times of Ignorance and Error, is as *Light* to *Darkneſs*, and *Day* to *Night*. And this happy Change in our Affairs is the Effect of our Lord's Firſt Coming.

2. The glorious Expectations, which all good Chriſtians are taught to cheriſh, of Happineſs and Reward unſpeakable, to be obtained at their Saviour's Second Coming: Expreſs'd here by the *Day* and *Salvation.* And this is thought to be yet farther preſs'd upon us, by repreſenting the Shortneſs of our preſent Life, and the nearer Approaches, which that Bliſs every Day makes towards us. For in this Senſe ſome of the beſt Interpreters underſtand thoſe Words, *Now it is high Time to awake out of Sleep, for now is our Salvation nearer than when we believed; The Night is far ſpent, the Day is at Hand.*

Chryſ. Eſtius, &c.

The intended Brevity of that Method, I have ſet myſelf in this Undertaking, will not allow me to enlarge

large upon each of these Particulars, as they very well deserve. And I the rather dispense with myself upon the present Occasion, because the Matter now before us will be offered to our Consideration hereafter. Some Things shall then be spoken to more fully and distinctly, which cannot so conveniently find a room in this Discourse. I shall therefore hope my Reader will be contented, with having several Points, which this Exhortation of the Apostle suggests to us, only proposed to him here. While I confine my Thoughts at present to such of them only, as are peculiar to the Passage now before us, and more especially apposite to the Design of this Season.

To begin then with the First General Head, which contains the Duties enjoined here by St. *Paul*. And *First*, Of Charity, or loving one another.

Now for the setting of this Matter in its true Light, it is very plain, these following Particulars are fit to be considered.

1. *First*, The Nature of this Love, or wherein it properly consists. But, because St. *Paul* hath elsewhere employed a whole Chapter upon this Matter, I beg leave to remit my Reader to that Portion of Scripture, and what I shall have to say upon it, when coming under Consideration in the Course of the Epistles.

1 *Cor.* xiii. Epist. for *Quinquagesima* Sunday.

2. *Secondly*, The Object of our Love, or the Persons to whom it ought to extend. Which though the eighth Verse here directs us in, and, by making loving *Another*, and loving our *Neighbour*, Terms equivalent, do imply, that no Person whatsoever ought to be excluded: Yet this Extent, and the Reasons for it, will be more conveniently treated of hereafter, upon the Case of the Good Samaritan, and the Question, which gave Occasion for that Parable.

Luke x. 29. Gospel for xiii. Sunday after Trin.

3. *Thirdly*, The juſt Meaſure and Degree of this Virtue; We muſt love our Neighbour as ourſelves. And This alſo ſhall be adjuſted, when we handle that Paſſage of Scripture laſt mentioned.

4. *Fourthly*, The vaſt Comprehenſion, and peculiar Excellence of this Love; declares here, in that it is ſaid to be the Subſtance, and Sum, and Fulfilling of the Law. Our Lord ſays, *On theſe two Commandments, viz.* The Love of God, and that of our Neighbour, *hang all the Law and the Prophets:* Whereas St. *Paul* ſays here of the Love of our Neighbour alone, that it is the *Fulfilling of the Law.* And again, *All the Law is fulfilled in One Word, even in This, Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf.*

Matt. xxii. 40. ver. 8, 9, 10.

Gal. ver. 14.

Now, for a right Underſtanding of this Matter, there is not, I conceive, any Occaſion for attributing to that Word, *Another*, a Signification ſo extenſive, as ſhould include God and our Neighbour both. But I rather chuſe to take the Apoſtle's Meaning in one of theſe Two Senſes.

1. *Firſt*, By the Law here he may be underſtood to mean the Second Table only; ſo limiting this Term to the Subject-Matter of his preſent Diſcourſe, The Duty to our Neighbour. The ſeveral Precepts hereof are contained in this Chapter: Five of them ſpecified, Ver. 9. and the other, which anſwers to the Fifth Commandment, inſiſted on from Ver. 1. to the 8th. And thus the Character he gives us will import thus much: That all the Branches of the Duty Men owe to each other, are reducible to, ſummed up in, and diſcharged by the Obſervance of, that one general, that moſt compendious Rule, *Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thyſelf.*

2. *Secondly*, Including the Duty we owe to God, it may very truly be ſaid, That the Firſt, as well as the Second Table is comprized in this Precept; becauſe the Love of our Neighbour ſuppoſes the Love of God, as a

neceſſary Pre-diſpoſition. It proceeds upon, and ſprings out of this as its proper Foundation and Root. For true Chriſtian Charity is not that ſort of Affection, which owes its Birth to Partiality, or Paſſion, or any Selfiſh and Worldly Conſiderations. It is not the Reſult of Intereſt, or Nearneſs of Blood, or Gratitude for good Offices, or the like. Theſe may draw the Knot cloſer, and are allowed to make ſome Difference, in our Regards and Behaviour, between one Man and another. But that which ties the Knot at firſt, and renders the Obligation indiſpenſable and univerſal, is a Motive, as extenſive as the Object of this Love itſelf. A Principle of Religion; a Reſpect to that Image of God, in which every Man reſembles his Maker; A Concern and Tenderneſs, for which we have that God our Pattern, who loves all that are thus allied to him. And therefore no Man does, no Man can, love his Neighbour, as a Chriſtian; who does not firſt love God, and then his Neighbour upon God's Account.

This Matter may poſſibly receive ſome Illuſtration, from that Paſſage of *Hoſea*, alledged by our Lord, in Vindication of ſome Acts of Humanity and Compaſſion, for which the Phariſees calumniated Him, and his Diſciples. *Go ye*, ſays he, *and learn what that meaneth, I will have Mercy and not Sacrifice.* And again, *If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have Mercy and not Sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the Guiltleſs.* By Mercy and not Sacrifice, is meant, according to the *Hebrew* Idiom, Mercy rather than Sacrifice. The Former denotes all thoſe good Offices, which conduce to the Comfort and Relief of Mankind. The latter, all thoſe Religious Obſervances, whereby we expreſs our Honour and Reverence for Almighty God. So that the Oppoſition here does not lie between the Moral, and the Ceremonial Part of the Law; no, nor properly between our Duty to God, and that to our Neighbour; but the true Importance of thoſe Words I ap-

Matth. ix. 13. —— xii. 7.

prehend to be this: That God, having commanded us to love and ſerve Him, and having appointed Inſtances and Acts of different Kinds, whereby this ſhould be done, is content upon ſome Occaſions to ſeem to wave his Privilege. When Matters therefore ſo fall out, that we cannot attend to Mercy and Sacrifice both, He prefers Works of Charity before thoſe of Piety ſtrictly ſo called. That is, He had much rather we ſhould teſtify our Love to him, by Acts of Kindneſs done for His Sake, to our Brethren, whoſe Neceſſities call for our Help, and who may be the better for them; than that we ſhould neglect theſe, and employ ourſelves in the moſt ſolemn Acts of Worſhip, which immediately regard, and terminate intirely in Himſelf, who neither ſtands in need of, nor can receive any real Advantage from them. Mercy then and Sacrifice are only two different Methods of expreſſing one and the ſame Love of God; and he eſteems himſelf loved beſt and moſt acceptably, when we love our Neighbour for His Sake.

But to enter a little deeper into this Matter. Nothing can poſſibly be the Object of our Love but Good; and all Goodneſs is in, and from, God. He is the common Source, from whence it is derived, and where it reſides in its utmoſt Perfection. Our Neighbours have a Right to our Love, by Virtue of thoſe Communications of Goodneſs, which God out of his own Fulneſs hath made to them. Theſe are the next and ſenſible Objects, but God is the principal and ultimate one, of our religious Affection. This is but one and the ſame Habit in our Souls: though the Acts by which, and the Perſons towards whom, it is exerciſed, be diverſified, as fit Occaſions offer themſelves. Thus our Neighbour is conſidered as a limited, and ſubordinate, and derivative; but God as the ſole, infinite, ſupreme, and original Good. The Principle then and Foundation of Love is the ſame in both Caſes. But the Meaſures and the Motives of it are thus far different, that our Neighbour is

to

to be loved for God's ſake, and God for his Own ſake. Conſequently, *He that loves another* fulfils the Law in its moſt comprehenſive Senſe; becauſe the Second Table can be diſcharged by that Principle only, which ſecures our Obedience to the Firſt. And, as St. *John* declares that *Man to be a Liar*, who profeſſes *to love God*, and yet *loves not his Brother*; ſo may we moſt aſſuredly depend upon the Reverſe of that Sentence, and affirm, that no Chriſtian truly loves his Brother, who does not love God. The former Pretence implies the Abſurdity of a Cauſe, without its neceſſary and inſeparable Effect; The Latter ſuppoſes an Effect, ſubſiſting without that Cauſe, which alone is ſufficient to produce it. 1 John iv. 20.

5. The *Fifth* and laſt Thing, to be taken Notice of here, is, The Manner of St. *Paul*'s expreſſing our Obligation to this Duty. Which he hath done in thoſe very ſignificant Terms, *Owe no Man any Thing, but to love one another*. He had commanded us to *render to all their Dues*; and, with regard to all the Engagements, which Mens Circumſtances in the World make them any Way Debtors to, he ſays here again, *Owe no Man any Thing*. But then he proceeds to diſtinguiſh between the Law of Juſtice, and that of Charity. He repreſents the Former, as a Debt which may be ſo diſcharged, that we ſhall owe no more. The Tributes, the Cuſtoms, the Fear, the Honour, enjoined in the foregoing Verſes, may be paid clear off. But this Latter of Love it ſeems cannot be ſo ſatisfied, that there ſhall reſt nothing due, at the Foot of the Account. This is a very material Circumſtance, and the Reaſons of it may in ſome Meaſure appear to us, from the following Conſiderations. Ver. 7.

1. *Firſt*, The Law of Juſtice and that of Charity differ in the End, which each of them is deſigned to ſerve. The Things, which Juſtice hath in View, are Peace, and Quiet, Order and Decency, and good Government: To the promoting and ſecuring of theſe, the Wiſdom of

of God and good Men have ſuited thoſe Duties and Obſervances, which conſtitute the Body of natural and poſitive Laws, relating to this Matter. But the End of Charity is the General Benefit of all Mankind; and This Law takes in every Action, that can any Way conduce to the Happineſs of every individual Perſon. Suppoſing then our Diligence never ſo great, in promoting this Deſign hitherto; yet as oft as any new Opportunities are offered, of contributing to any Man's Good hereafter, ſo often there ariſes a freſh Obligation to do our utmoſt towards it.

2. *Secondly*, The Meaſures of Juſtice are to be taken from the particular Acts enjoined, and the ſeveral Relations wherein Men ſtand to one another: And when thoſe Acts are done as the Law directs, the Perſon is liable to no farther Demands. Theſe Acts again vary, as Men differ in their reſpective Stations. Some are peculiar to Parents, and Governors, and Superiors: Others to Children, and Subjects, and Inferiors: So that every Man's Taſk is ſet out, and the Duties of One Capacity are plainly diſtinguiſhed from thoſe of another. But Charity does not confine itſelf to any Condition; it takes in a larger Compaſs, and conſiders Men, not under ſuch or ſuch Circumſtances, but in general, as Men. This Duty is common to All, and cannot be limited like the former; becauſe it can never ſo happen, but that, in ſome kind or other, every Man living is capable of being beneficial to ſome, nay to every, other Man. For They, whoſe Hands are ſhorteſt, may yet have Hearts as large as the greateſt Monarch upon Earth, and the moſt mean and indigent Condition cannot deprive us of the Power, by Prayers and hearty good Wiſhes at leaſt, to extend our Charity all the World over.

3. *Thirdly*, The Scriptures, thoſe of the New Teſtament eſpecially, have urged this Duty of Love upon us, from ſuch Topicks, as plainly ſhew, that it is a Debt never to be compleatly ſatisfied. Such in particular are the Examples of God the Father, whoſe Mercies are over

over all his Works; ſuch the amazing Kindneſs of God the Son, who, by doing and ſuffering ſo great Things for us, hath put it paſt our Ability to diſcharge that Obligation perfectly, of *loving one another as He hath loved us.* Nevertheleſs, ſo it hath pleaſed God to diſpoſe our Affairs, that, tho' the utmoſt we can do, fall infinitely ſhort of a juſt Requital; yet every Day furniſhes fit Occaſions of making ſome ſort of Return, for this unparalleled Bounty and Love. The World will always abound with evil and unjuſt Men, and conſequently we can never want Opportunities of forgiving them that injure, and loving them that hate us; that is, of writing after the Copy of his marvellous Compaſſion, who *makes his Sun to riſe on the Evil and on the Good, and ſendeth Rain on the Juſt and on the Unjuſt*; but eſpecially of approving ourſelves his Children and Diſciples, who *in this commended his Love towards us, that while we were yet Sinners, Chriſt died for us.* There will ever be diſtreſſed and neceſſitous Objects to beſtow our Charity upon. And theſe our Bleſſed Redeemer hath appointed his Deputies and Receivers. *In as much as ye did it to the leaſt of theſe my Brethren, ye did it unto me.* We ought therefore to look upon it as a ſignal Bleſſing, that the *Poor we have always with us, and whenſoever we will we may do them good:* That we can feed and cloath hungry and naked Chriſt in his ſuffering Members; that the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of Providence make the Wants of ſome, miniſter Occaſion to the Virtue of Others; that God accepts our Kindneſs to our Brethren, as Payments to himſelf: Nay, not as Payments only, but as transferring the Obligation: And rendering Him our Debtor, for a ſmall Part of that, which we owe, and cannot pay at all to Him immediately, and in his own proper Perſon.

John xv. 12.

Matth. ver. 45.

Rom. ver. 8.

Matt. xxv. 40.

Mark xiv. 7.

4. To all this we may add, *Fourthly*, That the Payment of this is not like the Diſcharge of common Debts, a Bur-

a Burthen and a Leſſening to ourſelves; but ſo ſuited to our Nature, ſo full of ſubſtantial and ſolid Satisfaction, ſo many Ways recommended and made agreeable to us, that the more Good we do, the more we feel ourſelves ſtill diſpoſed to do. No Part of what the greedieſt Man retains, yields half the Enjoyment, the ſweet Complacency, the true Gain, which the Liberal Man finds, in what he expends for the Benefit of others. The Ability, and the Diſpoſition to do Good, are each of them a particular Bleſſing, Grace and Talent, which God entruſts us with; and Theſe, like all other Graces, oblige us to Thankfulneſs for them. But our Lord never eſteems us truly thankful, except when we uſe and improve his Gifts, to the Purpoſes they properly ſerve. So that every Opportunity for Acts of Kindneſs ſhould quicken us in the Exerciſe of them; and lays a freſh Engagement upon us, to be more Zealous, more Munificent, in Proportion, as we find our Power increaſe, and our Hearts enlarged, by thoſe Bleſſings, and that Charity, which are poured upon us from above.

5. *Fifthly*, The Difference between this and other Debts is remarkable, upon Account of the different Diſpoſitions of the Perſons obliged by it. Not ſatisfying the Debts, we contract in common Trading, proceeds from Injuſtice, and a ſordid or negligent Temper, and is therefore ſcandalous and diſhonourable. But it is a Mark, by which great and truly generous Minds are diſtinguiſhed, never to think they have done Good enough, but greedily to embrace every freſh Occaſion, and think themſelves bound ſtill to be more and more beneficial. And the ſuppoſing we have fully ſatisfied our Obligation of this Kind, argues the ſame Narrowneſs of Spirit, which tempts us not to ſatisfy all others.

Upon all theſe Accounts the Apoſtle ſeems to have had great Reaſon, for diſtinguiſhing this Debt of Love from all other Debts; as That which alone is univerſal and perpetual: So far from being over-paid, that tho' we are always paying, yet there will be always ſomewhat reſting

reſting due. And here I ſhould think myſelf at liberty to diſmiſs the *Firſt* of thoſe Duties recommended in this *Epiſtle*; were it not expedient to remove one Scruple, which ſome very well diſpoſed Readers may be apt to fall into, from the latter Part of my Diſcourſe upon it.

For, if the Obligation to Charity be ſo unlimited, ſo much ſuperior to any other, and ſuch as we can never exceed in: If the Perſon, whoſe Debtors we are, and whoſe Example is our Rule and Guide in this Matter, have been pleaſed to interpret and accept the good Offices done to his needy Members upon Earth, as done to Himſelf: Will it not then become us, like honeſt Debtors, to ſtrip ourſelves of all, that ſo we may go as far as ever we can, towards the Diſcharge of this Engagement? Ought not even a convenient Subſiſtence, and the Proviſion for our Families, and thoſe other Conſiderations, which are uſually thought reaſonable to preſcribe Meaſures to our Liberality, to be all ſet aſide, that we may expend our whole Subſtance upon ſo good an Account, as that of making Payment to Chriſt in his afflicted Repreſentatives? This is an Objection, which may deſerve to be more diſtinctly conſidered; but I ſhall only mention Two or Three Things at preſent, ſufficient (I hope) to ſet my Reader at Eaſe, from any unneceſſary Perplexities with regard to it.

Now, *Firſt*, It muſt be remembered, that Charity always preſuppoſes Juſtice; and conſequently, no Pretence of Liberality, or Mercy, can make it lawful to defraud thoſe, in whom the Laws of Nature, or civil Society, have veſted a Right, to what would be thus diſtributed. God, under the Old Law, would not accept that which was ſtolen in Sacrifice; and our Lord in the Goſpel, upbraids the Phariſees with Hypocriſy and Barbarity for neglecting to ſuſtain their Parents; and thinking to juſtify ſuch undutiful Treatment, by devoting that Wealth to God; which ſhould have relieved their Diſtreſſes. Now the ſame Rule holds in Proportion to other

Matt. xv. 5, 6, 7, &c.

other Relations: And where theſe have an antecedent Claim, to expoſe Them to Want, by ſupplying the Wants of Others, is not Bounty, but Robbery and unnatural Injuſtice. We muſt obſerve the Method, in which the Apoſtle proceeds here; firſt *to render to all their Dues*, and then to diſpoſe of the Remainder, as Religion and Prudence ſhall direct. Luxury and Vanity ſhould be no Bar to our Charity: But till we have ſatisfied the Duty of our reſpective Capacities, we are not yet in a Condition of *owing no Man any Thing*; and therefore cannot be at Liberty, to transfer thoſe Proviſions to the Uſe of the Poor, for which our own Fleſh and Blood may make a reaſonable and juſt Demand upon us. From hence we may infer,

Secondly, This Obligation to Love cannot be unlimited, except with regard to the inward Diſpoſition: 'Tis manifeſt, it cannot poſſibly be ſo, with regard to the Outward Act of Charity. Theſe muſt needs be bounded, by our Circumſtances in the World, by the Relations in which we ſtand, by the very former Acts of this Kind; each of which leaves in our Power leſs than we had before. But tho' no Man's Abilities can extend to all that want, yet every Man may ſincerely and earneſtly wiſh the Succours he cannot give; and the Sincerity of thoſe Deſires he may approve by doing all the Good he can; and by praying for and promoting that which in his own Perſon he cannot effect. Thus his Love may, and ought to be unbounded; and in this Temper of the Mind it is, that the Eſſence of Charity truly conſiſts. The Apoſtle, we ſee, ſuppoſes it poſſible, that a Man ſhould give *all his Goods to feed the Poor*, and yet not *have Charity*: Therefore, it is neither the Act of Giving, nor the Quantity of the Gift, but the Principle from whence it proceeds, which recommends it to God's Acceptance. And our Bleſſed Saviour by preferring the *Widow's two Mites*, before the very magnificent Contributions of many wealthy Perſons, hath taught us plainly,

1 Cor. xiii. 3.

Mark xii. 43, 44.

ly, that God will judge us by the Intenſeneſs of our Love; and that this will be meaſured by that Proportion, which our Liberality bears to our ſeveral Abilities and Circumſtances in the World. But then it is true again,

Thirdly, That there is another Branch of this Love, in which not only the Diſpoſition, but the Act itſelf ought to know no Bounds: That I mean, of bearing and forgiving Injuries. No Man is allowed to ſet ſuch Meaſures to himſelf as theſe: So many Wrongs I will pardon and no more; ſo long I will continue my Love; and then let looſe the Reins to Hatred and Revenge: For here our Bleſſed Maſter's Rule takes Place, *I ſay unto you, not until ſeven Times, but until ſeventy Times ſeven.* Our greateſt Crimes, and ſuch as we daily repeat, do not weary out the Mercy of God, though each of theſe deſerve ſpeedy and eternal Vengeance. And therefore the moſt heinous Provocations from our Brethren ought not to extinguiſh our Charity; or make us ceaſe either ourſelves to forgive, or heartily to pray that God would forgive, even our moſt unreaſonable, even our moſt implacable Enemies. Thus much, I think, may ſuffice at preſent, concerning the firſt Duty commanded here; and the Apoſtle's peculiar Manner of expreſſing it, in thoſe Words, *Owe no Man any Thing, but to love one another.*

Matt. xviii. 22.

II. I proceed now to the Second Thing, urged upon us in this Exhortation, *viz.* Purity of Heart and Life. To which I ſhall at preſent ſay only ſo much, as reſults from the Explanation of thoſe figurative Terms, by which the Apoſtle hath recommended it to us. And they are Four:

1. *Awaking out of Sleep.* Ver. 11.

2. *Caſting off the Works of Darkneſs, and putting on the Armour of Light.* Ver. 12.

3. *Walking honeſtly, as in the Day*, Or, avoiding thoſe Vices, which are manifeſtly here implied, to be attended with Indecency and Shame. Ver. 13.

4. *Putting*

Ver. 14. 4. *Putting on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, and (in Agreement with, or as a neceſſary Conſequence of this) *Not making Proviſion for the Fleſh, to fulfil the Luſts thereof.*

1. The *Firſt* of theſe Metaphors compares a Life of Senſuality and Sin, to *Sleep*; and the ſhaking off ſuch a diſſolute Converſation, to Mens *awaking out of that Sleep*. And this I might make appear to be a very proper Reſemblance, upon many Accounts; more particularly theſe *Three that follow.*

1. As Sleep is a Condition of Blindneſs and great Deluſion. It entertains us with dark, and confuſed, and inconſiſtent Images of Things; which, when our waking Thoughts reflect upon, we find to have Nothing in them, but Falſhood and Deceit. Thus the ſenſual Man, who feeds and is governed by his Paſſions, lives, as it were, in one continued Dream. He flatters himſelf with wild and empty Notions of Things, eſteems thoſe Vanities and Exceſſes to be the Perfection and Happineſs, which are in very Deed the Blemiſh and Miſery of Human Nature. And all his fancied Satisfactions are ſo far from yielding any true Enjoyment, that, after the utmoſt Induſtry to indulge them, they leave him at laſt under that wretched Diſappointment deſcribed by the Prophet *Iſaiah*. *As when a hungry Man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth, but he awaketh, and his Soul is empty*; *or as when a thirſty Man dreameth, and, behold he drinketh, but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his Soul hath Appetite:* So it is with all, who make the Gratification of their ſenſual Affections, the End and Buſineſs of Life. They purſue after ſomething, which for a little while works ſtrongly upon their Imaginations, ſooths and tickles them with a falſe and treacherous Delight; but, when their Eyes are opened, and they awaken into ſerious and compoſed Thought, the Airy Idea vaniſhes immediately;

Iſaiah xxix. 8.

immediately; and the Perſons, who ſuppoſed themſelves poſſeſſed of moſt, upon a juſt Computation, find *Nothing in their Hands.* Pſal. lxxvi. 5.

2. As Sleep is a State of Negligence and Inactivity. Neceſſary indeed this is, for the Recruit of theſe frail and feeble Bodies of ours; which cannot bear continued Labour and Thought, without ſome Intervals of Reſt and frequent Suſpenſions of our nobleſt Powers. But it is the Animal Life only, which receives Benefit by ſuch Intermiſſions. To the Rational all that Time is loſt: and the Man (properly ſpeaking) is dead, to the beſt and true Purpoſes of Living. So likewiſe ſenſual Pleaſures adminiſter to the meaner and brutal Part of the Soul, our Appetites and Affections; but Reaſon and Religion are ſo far from receiving any Improvement, that they are manifeſtly impaired, by our ſtudious Gratifications of, and vehement Purſuits after them. If theſe Pleaſures be of a ſinful Kind, they manifeſtly *war againſt the Soul.* And if they be innocent 1 Pet. ii. 11. in their Kind, but immoderate in their Degree, they bring upon us a fatal Habit of ſpiritual Drowſineſs: make us unthinking and heavy in our Duty, dull to good Impreſſions, and unfit for vigorous Improvements. Like thoſe Drones who ſleep, not for Refreſhment, but Wantonneſs and Sloth, we make the vacant Spaces of Life ſo many, and ſo large, that all our good Diſpoſitions languiſh and grow cold upon our Hands. The Things that are temporal and preſent, when too long dwelt upon, will render us of courſe regardleſs and inſenſible of diſtant and ſpiritual; and leave us at laſt as little Inclination, as Leiſure, for the Diſcharge of that great Work, which God ſent us into the World about.

3. The Pertinence of this Compariſon appears yet farther, in regard Sleep is a State, liable to great Danger and Surpriſe; ſuch as Enemies and Robbers take Advantage of, becauſe we are then leaſt of all in a Condition to diſcover or prevent their Attempts upon us. And this is evidently the Caſe of a ſenſual Life. It lulls

and ſtupifies Men with a falſe Security; keeps them in Ignorance of the infinite Perils, which beſet them on every Side; and does not only expoſe them to Aſſaults, but even aſſiſt the Adverſary againſt them. For thoſe very Affections, which ſuch Perſons are at ſo much Pains to gratify and cheriſh, are the Engines and Inſtruments employed in the Deſtruction of Souls. Every Indulgence of theſe, beyond due Meaſure, is like drawing a Sword, and turning the Point of it upon one's own ſelf. And they who do ſo, inſtead of ſtanding upon their Guard, march directly up to the Mouth of the loaded Cannon, help to lay the Ambuſcade, and turn their own Tempters.

Now a Life of Sobriety and ſevere Virtue, ſuch as the Goſpel preſcribes, and the Apoſtle here recommends, is, on the other Hand, very fitly repreſented by *Awaking out of Sleep*.

1. As it opens Men's Eyes, diſabuſes them of their Errors, teaches them to paſs a right Judgment, and to make a juſt Computation, of Things; inſpires them with a generous Diſdain of ſordid and brutiſh, and puts them upon ſeeking every Way manly Pleaſures; ſuch as are ſubſtantial and durable, ſpiritual and ſatisfactory, anſwerable to the Dignity, and proportioned to the Deſires of a Reaſonable and Immortal Soul.

2. As it rouſes Men to Action, and ſuffers them not to loiter away their precious Hours in idle and unprofitable Living; but fires them with a vigorous Zeal, of doing good, of anſwering their Character, and diſpatching their Maſter's Buſineſs, with Diligence and Chearfulneſs.

3. As it gives them due Apprehenſions of their Danger, and keeps a ſtrict Guard againſt the Malice and Cunning, of an Enemy, who, they are ſenſible, lies in wait continually to deſtroy them. Theſe wakeful Men, as oft as the Cares and Diverſions of this Life diſpoſe them to ſlumber, conſider, that Death and Danger are ever at hand, and therefore they ſleep in their Arms.

Their Appetites and Paſſions, I mean, are kept under ſtrict Diſcipline, and their very firſt Motions nicely obſerved, and timely ſubdued. They know the Difficulties of the Way, and take every Step, with a Warineſs, becoming Men, who travel in the midſt of Snares and Precipices. And thus they *awake* out of the Blindneſs and Deluſion, the Negligence and Inactivity, and are provided againſt the Hazards and Surpriſes, of this Spiritual *Sleep*.

2 The *Second* Figure, by which this Purity of Life is expreſſed, we have (Ver. 12.) *in caſting off the Works of Darkneſs, and putting on the Armour of Light.* By *Darkneſs* here may be meant, either Ignorance or Privacy. And conſequently the *Works* of it will import, Either ſuch, as no Man in his Senſes would be guilty of, did he rightly underſtand the natural Turpitude, which is in them; Or elſe ſuch, as They who do commit, are ſo far aſhamed of, as to affect Secrecy, and by all poſſible Means labour to conceal them from the Eye of the World. Night and Shades, and the privateſt Corners are ſought, as the only proper Scenes, for Facts, which carry their own Condemnation along with them, and brand the Actor with Infamy: He therefore would not be ſeen, becauſe conſcious to himſelf, that if ſeen, he muſt of courſe be diſapproved, and deſpiſed, and deteſted. Theſe then Chriſtians muſt throw aſide and leave off, like thoſe tattered or ſullied Garments, in which it would be a Reproach to ſee Company. And, in their ſtead ſuch Habits muſt be put on, as are fit to appear in Broad Day, ſuch as will bear the niceſt Obſervation, and make them ſhine as Lights in the World. And, as their Comelineſs juſtifies the Title of *Light*; ſo are they very properly termed *Armour* too. For theſe Diſpoſitions and Habits fortify the Mind, and repel the Darts of the Spiritual Enemy. There being no better Preſervative againſt Temptations, than that of being well employed, and a ſtrict Regard to the Decency of every Thing we do. And

these good Habits are once more said to be *put on*, with Allusion to our common Cloathing; Intimating, that, as no Part of the Body is left naked, which would either be offensive and unseemly to the Sight, or suffer by being exposed to the Weather; so no Part of the Soul should be destitute of the Virtues proper for it, no Graces wanting, which may contribute either to its Ornament, or to its Defence.

3. Another Expression of like Importance, we have in those Words, Ver. 13. *Let us walk honestly, as in the Day*; In Opposition whereunto are those several Vices, specified in the following Part of the Verse, which draw upon Men the Scandal and Scorn of all that behold them. And this Metaphor is likewise taken from the Care Men usually take, to recommend themselves to the Esteem of Others, by a Garb clean and decent, and suitable to their Quality. Now, since the Sight and Observation of Others is the Argument insisted upon here, Christians must be careful to take this in its just Extent. In Deference to Men, a sordid or too negligent Outside is all we are solicitous to avoid, because their Observation can go no farther than the outward Appearance. But the same Reason obliges Christians in cloathing their Souls, to consider whose Inspection they are under in This Regard: Not only that of their Brethren, who may be imposed upon with artificial Disguises; but that of Saints and *Angels; and especially of Christ and God himself; One, whose Eyes are in every Place, to whom our very Hearts are open, and from whom no Secrets are hid: So that this Argument leaves no Room for Hypocrisy, no Cover for the private Things of Dishonesty; but requires Purity in our very Thoughts and Intentions; because even these are as visible to God's all-seeing Eye, as any the most public Indecencies, of our Garb and Behaviour, are to the Observation and Censure of Men. And, as the Respect due to those Spectators is greater far, than

* 1 Cor. xi. 10.

that we owe to any of the ſame Nature with ourſelves, tho' never ſo much above us in Quality and Worldly Diſtinctions: So are we always to remember, that, in regard of God, we act as it were upon a common Theatre; and ought no more to be guilty of the leaſt Evil or Indecency, even in Imagination or Deſire, than if we ſtood before the ſevereſt Judges, and did it in the Preſence of all Mankind.

Now the vicious Practices mentioned here, are all of them ſuch as tend to the Diſhonour and Detriment of Men, and are utterly inconſiſtent with the Dignity and Character of Chriſtians. Such are the Revellings and Exceſſes; the *Rioting and Drunkenneſs*; of which this Apoſtle ſays elſewhere, *They that be drunken are drunken in the Night; But let us who are of the Day be ſober.* 1 Theſ. v. 7, 8. Such the *Chambering and Wantonneſs*, The Lewdneſs and Beſtialities of the Heathen, ſo far ſelf-condemned, even among Them, as to endeavour their own Concealment. But for Chriſtians it is a *Shame*, he ſays, for *ſuch, even to ſpeak of thoſe Things which were done of them in ſecret.* Epheſ. v. 12. Such again the *Strife* and *Envying*, ſo directly oppoſite to that univerſal Kindneſs and Peace, which our bleſſed Maſter hath made the Badge and Livery, as it were, of all who retain to Him. For *by this*, ſays he, *ſhall all Men know that ye are my Diſciples, if ye have Love one to another*; John xiii. 35. and accordingly we are told, *He that hateth his Brother, is ſtill in Darkneſs, and walketh in Darkneſs.* 1 John ii. 11. And we cannot wonder, that theſe Sins, of Bitterneſs, and Diſorder, are here added to thoſe of Luxury and Lewdneſs; when it is conſider'd, how naturally Hatred and Contention ſpring from the Heats of Exceſs; and that the moderating Men's ſenſual Appetites and Paſſions, were certainly the moſt effectual Courſe, to preſerve Amity and good Order in the World. The moſt furious Quarrels and Heart-burnings, whether public or private, are not about the neceſſary Supports

of Life; but for those Superfluities, which feed our Lusts and our Pride, and minister to Pomp and Extravagance. And therefore, in opposition to those scandalous Qualities, which, like Filth and Rags, disparage and disfigure a Christian, we are commanded in the

4. *Fourth* and Last Place, to *put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and not make Provision for the Flesh, to fulfil the Lusts thereof.* Whether this Metaphor of *putting on Christ* allude to our Cloathing in general; Or whether more particularly to that Emblem of Innocence, the White Robe formerly used to be put on at Baptism; is no very material Enquiry. The Design of it is manifestly this. Instead of those Vicious Habits, which are a Deformity to Christians, and a Dishonour to their Profession, to recommend such Ornaments, as suit with our Condition, and will not fail to procure us Respect, from those with whom we converse. And the Expression imports, that Christ should be our pattern; *that* His Sobriety and Gravity, His Meekness, and Moderation, and great Charity, and all the Virtues and Graces so conspicuous in Him, should be (if I may so say) the Things in Fashion with all his Followers: *That* They who are out of this Mode make a very aukward and ridiculous Figure, such as derives Disgrace and Contempt upon them: And that these Excellencies in Christ, should be as familiar to us, as inseparable from us, as evident a Distinction of our Quality, as the Apparel we constantly wear, is to our Bodies. Particularly, That we should let this World, and its Affairs and Delights, sit as loose about us as may be; by imitating his abstemious Life, and making a Difference, between the Supplies necessary for the Subsistence of our Outward Man, and the superfluous Vanities, which heighten its Appetites, inflame its Passions, and indulge it in Luxury and Sin. Some *Provision* we may, nay we ought to *make for the Flesh*; such as may preserve it, in the Condition God hath set it in, as a Servant and Instrument to the Spirit: Such as may render

Gal. iii. 27.

render it fit for Duty, and preſerve it in Obedience to the higher and commanding Part of us. But, as our Creator hath appointed the Body in a State of Subordination to the Soul: So all the Comforts and Delights of it ſhould aim, not at Enjoyment, but Uſe; and be directed to the Benefit of that Better Part, of which the Man, and the Happineſs of his Nature, principally conſiſts. And this is a Caution, highly ſeaſonable, and pertinent to the Apoſtle's Deſign; in regard that all the Vices mentioned before, and whatſoever elſe is either a Blemiſh or an Obſtruction to the Spiritual and Divine Life, proceed from an undue Preference of the Bodily and Fleſhly Part, and making the Gratifications of, and Care for That, the main End and Meaſure of our Actions.

II. I have now at length done with the Duties enjoined, and paſs to my *Second* General Head, The Motives made uſe of here to enforce them. Which are contain'd in thoſe Words, *And that knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of Sleep, for now is our Salvation nearer than when we believed. The Night is far ſpent, the Day is at hand.* Ver 11. 12. Theſe Paſſages admit of a Two-fold Interpretation, each of which furniſhes an Argument very pertinent to the Apoſtle's Purpoſe.

1. For *Firſt*, Some by the *Night* and the *Day* underſtand the Darkneſs of the Times before, and the Light of thoſe under, the Goſpel; And theſe, by *Salvation being nearer than when they believed*, do ſuppoſe St. *Paul* to mean, the Advantages, which theſe *Romans*, who acknowledg'd a Meſſias already come, now enjoy'd, above what belong'd to them, while only expecting the promiſed Meſſias yet to come. Rom. iii. 11.

The Force of the Argument, taken in this Senſe, lies here; That it highly concerns Men to conſider the Bleſſings of a clearer Revelation, and the Profit God expects they ſhould make of it: *That* they are obliged to

improve in Holineſs, proportionably to the Means and Opportunities of living better, put into our Hands: *That*, after ſo full Inſtructions, and ſo bright an Example, as thoſe of the Holy and Merciful Jeſus, it would be a moſt indecent, a moſt inexcuſable Abſurdity; if They, who are called his Diſciples, and profeſs to tread in his Steps, ſhould abandon themſelves to the Works of Malice and Shame; and be ſo far from the ſignal Virtues, which Chriſtians ought to be diſtinguiſh'd by, as even to loſe the Bowels and the Modeſty of Common Men. Thus the Conſideration of our Lord's *Firſt* Advent, the Doctrines he taught, and the Copy he hath ſet us, ſerve the Deſign of this Exhortation very well. But for any farther Enlargement upon this Conſtruction of the Words, I muſt refer my Reader to * another Place; and at preſent ſatisfy myſelf with repreſenting the Arguments contain'd in them, when interpreted of our Lord's Second Coming. For,

* *See* Epiſt. *for* Epiph.

2. Every Reader of the New Teſtament muſt needs have obſerved the frequent Mention made there of One Day eminent and remarkable above all the reſt. One ſtiled upon this Account by way of paticular Deſignation, * *The Day* † *That Day:* Called elſewhere, ‖ *The Day of the Son of Man*, ** *The Day of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, †† *The Day of God*, ‖‖ *The Day of Reſtitution* or final Conſummation *of all Things*, ‡ *The Day of Judgment:* And diſtinguiſh'd by many other Titles, which denote, that in that Day the Glory of Chriſt ſhall ſhine forth in its full Luſtre; that a perfect Diſcrimination ſhall then be made between the Good and Bad, and every Man receive an eternal Recompence according to the things done in his Body. This Day many Expoſitors underſtand here, as repreſented ſtill future, by that Expreſſion of being *at hand:* whereas the Day of Goſpel-Light, and Chriſt's firſt Advent was already come upon theſe *Romans*, and could not ſo properly be deſcribed,

* Heb. x. 25.
† 2 Tim. iv. 8.
‖ Luke xvii. 24.
** 1 Cor. v. 5. 2 Theſſ. v. 2. Phil. ii. 16.
†† 2 Pet. iii. 12.
‖‖ Acts iii. 12.
‡ Matt. xii. 36. 2 Pet. ii. 9.

deſcribed, as yet approaching. Thus the *Night* here will anſwer to the preſent Life, a State of Wandering, and Weakneſs, and great Imperfection. And *the Salvation* will import that Bliſs, which the Faithful expect and depend upon, when that righteous Judge ſhall ſave all them, who perſevere in good Works, and live and die in his Fear. Ver. 11.

Now, admitting the Ignorance and general Depravation of former Ages, to be well reſembled by the Darkneſs of the *Night*; and the Perfection of good Men in the next World, by the bright Shine of the *Day:* We may ſtill diſcern, between theſe Two, a middle State of Things, anſwerable to the Springing of the Morning, and the Riſing of the Sun. A Dawn ſufficient to guide our Feet into the Way of Happineſs and Peace; though infinitely ſhort of the Comforts and Glories of that Bleſſed Noon, when all the Clouds of Sin and Infirmity ſhall be ſcattered, and we ſhall ſee and be like that God, who is *Light* ſo pure, that *in Him is no Darkneſs at all.* Thus we may find good Reaſon, why *the Night* ſhould under this Goſpel-State be repreſented as *far ſpent*, but not abſolutely done away; and *the Day* ſaid to be *at hand*, though not come in its full Strength. For frail Mortality will always have ſome Remains of Shadow and Duſk. The brighteſt Virtue and the cleareſt Knowledge, ſtop vaſtly ſhort of that Perfection of both, which will break upon Wiſe and Good Men, and hereafter, at the Reſurrection of the Juſt. 1 John 1. 5.

This Day is very differently deſcribed, according to the different Condition of the Perſons to be concern'd in it. With regard to the Wicked, in Circumſtances full of Terror, as that, which ſhall *diſcover the hidden things of diſhoneſty*; *bring the Secrets of all Hearts* into Judgment; and pour upon ſuch the Wrath and Vengeance of a provoked, and then implacable, God. To the Righteous, as a Day, which ſhall

1 Cor. iv. 5.
Rom. ii. 16.
Rom. ii. 5.
Rev. vi. 17.
Matt. vii. 23.
Matt. xxv. 34. &c.
2 Tim. iv. 8.
Rom. viii. 23.

manifeſt

Luke xxi. 28. 1 Cor. xiii. 12. xv. 53, 54. 1 John iii. 2.

manifeſt their good Deeds to all the World; crown them with publick Praiſe and everlaſting Bliſs; accompliſh their Redemption; abundantly compenſate their paſt Sufferings; anſwer and exceed their largeſt Hopes; and confer upon them that indefectible Holineſs and Wiſdom, which they, in the mean while, ſo zealouſly aſpire, ſo eagerly pant after.

This Latter, and more comfortable, Part of the Argument, is what the Apoſtle inſiſts upon, in the Paſſage now before us. The rather probably, that he might ſoften the Perſecutions and Afflictions, which Chriſtians then lay under, by the Proſpect of ſo glorious a Recompence; and by putting them in mind, that they were, every Day and Hour, advancing nearer to the End of their Troubles, and to that Salvation, in which they were taught to place their All, their only Happineſs. Thus wiſely providing againſt that too common Weakneſs, even in People of ſincere and good Intentions, who often ſet out at firſt with Warmth, and Vigour, and vehement Deſires; but are apt, in proceſs of time, to cool and languiſh, and grow remiſs, or weary of well-doing. Here then he hints the Folly, and the Sin, of ſlackening our Endeavour, when, like Racers, we ought rather to quicken our Pace, and to exert ourſelves more and more, in Proportion as we draw towards the Goal. For the Prize is given to none, who do not come up thither; we muſt finiſh, as well as begin well; and Perſeverance is the only thing, which can ſecure all our paſt *Labour*, though never ſo commendable hitherto, from being at laſt *in vain in the Lord.*

Now, what can be a more effectual Spur to the Virtues recommended here, than the Conſideration of ſuch a Day? If any thing have the Power to enlarge our Hearts, and open our Hands, in intire Affection and unbounded Charity; ſurely this Reflection muſt do it, that theſe Diſpoſitions and Acts of Beneficence, are the very Marks,

Marks, which ſhall then diſtinguiſh the Sheep from the Goats. If any thing prevail for the effectual Mortification of our brutal Appetites and Paſſions; the Excellence of this Salvation ſure will quicken and confirm this good Reſolution in us. If any thing ſupport us under the Afflictions of the World, and the Difficulties of Religion; it is the nearer Approach of that bliſsful Reward, which, if rightly eſtimated, would make us more than Conquerors. Much weaker Arguments than theſe are ſucceſsful, with them who ſtrive for a corruptible Crown; and what ſtupid Wretches are We, if we faint and give out, notwithſtanding Encouragements infinitely greater, when ſtriving for a Crown incorruptible? We, I ſay, whoſe Gain, is ineſtimable, whoſe Conflict is but ſhort, and whoſe Day (in reſpect of Death at leaſt, which will determine the eternal State of every Man's Soul) may, without a Figure, be moſt truly ſaid to be at *hand*, and even at the door. Shake off then (my Brethren) ſhake off your Sloth from this very Moment; Awake, for it is high Time that we ſhould All awake to Righteouſneſs. Let us up and be doing, every one of us; and ſo remember that Condeſcenſion of our Lord, *when he came to viſit us in great Humility*; *that our Loins may be girt, our Lights burning, and our Lamps trimm'd* that is our Souls adorn'd with all thoſe Graces and Good Works, which may prepare and fit us to meet this great King decently, *when he ſhall come to judge us in his Glorious Majeſty*. So ſhall we *riſe to the Life Immortal*, and, being found ſuch *as had put on the Lord Jeſus now in the time of this Mortal Life*, ſhall live and reign with him, *who liveth and reigneth with the Almighty Father and the Holy Ghoſt, now and ever*. Amen.

Matt. xxv. 34, &c.

1 Cor. ix. 25.

Luke xii. 35. 1 Pet. i. 13.

Collect.

There are ſome Inferences from the foregoing Particulars, proper to have been added here, but, this Comment having already exceeded its juſt Bounds, the Reader is deſired to conſult the Epiſtles and Goſpels already noted in the Margin.

The

See Mark xi.
Luke xix.
John xii.

The GOSPEL.

S. Matth. xxi. 1.

PARAPHRASE.

1, 2, 3. As our Lord one day was passing with his Disciples from *Bethany* towards *Jerusalem* (shortly after his raising *Lazarus* from the Dead, and five days before the Passover, at which he suffered) when they were as far on their way as *Bethphage*, and near the foot of the Mount of Olives.

1. *WHEN they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two Disciples,*

2. *Saying unto them, Go ye into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an Ass tied, and a Colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.*

3. *And if any Man say ought unto you, ye shall say, the Lord hath need of them, and straightway he will send them.*

Then, &c.

4, 5. This was not done by *Jesus*, with any Design to relieve himself from the Toil and Weariness of a long Journey (for the distance between *Jerusalem* and *Bethany* is but small) nor do we find him consulting his Ease after this manner, in much longer Travels; but he had other Reasons in view, and particularly, that, by this Approach to the Holy City, a Prophecy of *Zechariah*'s might be fulfilled in Him, which the ancient *Jews* constantly understood of the Messias. Now this foretels Matter of great Joy to *Jerusalem*, upon the Account of a King, who should distinguish himself from other Princes, by an Entry full of humble and most unusual Pomp; such as should express the Meekness of his Mind, and the Nature of his Dominion.

4. *All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Prophet saying,*

5. *Tell ye the Daughter of Sion, Behold thy King cometh unto thee, meek and sitting upon an Ass, and a Colt, the foal of an Ass.*

6. *And the Disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them,*

7. After having satisfied the Owners, who questioned them about loosing these Beasts; with their Leave they brought them;

7. *And brought the Ass and the Colt, and put on them their cloaths, and set him thereon.*

them; and, inſtead of riding Furniture, made uſe of their own Cloaths, and thus *Jeſus* rode.

8. *And a very great Multitude ſpread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and ſtrewed them in the way.*

8. Great Numbers of the People alſo aſſiſted at this Solemnity; they came out of the City to meet him; they performed ſuch Ceremonies of Joy and Reſpect, as were cuſtomary in public Rejoicings; particularly, with the *Jews* at their moſt ſplendid Feaſt, that of Tabernacles, and at the Inauguration of their Kings.

9. *And the Multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, ſaying, Hoſanna to the Son of David, Bleſſed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord: Hoſanna in the higheſt.*

9. In this ſolemn Proceſſion they conducted him to the City, ſhouting forth Acclamations, and Prayers to God for the Proſperity of this long expected King, this promiſed Seed of *David*. And theſe they uttered in the Prophetick Words of *David* himſelf, who many Ages ago foreſaw this Kingdom, and whoſe Expreſſions were ſo underſtood to belong to it, as frequently to be inſerted into the ſolemn Devotions of thoſe ancient *Jews*, who believed and longed for it.

10. *And when he was come into Jeruſalem, all the City was moved, ſaying, Who is this?*

10. This Proceeding filled all the Inhabitants of *Jeruſalem* with Wonder. To whom the Multitudes juſtified themſelves, by acknowledging openly, that they paid theſe Honours to that eminent Prophet, *Jeſus*. The Phariſees alſo, moved with Envy and Indignation at ſuch publick Reſpects, would have had *Jeſus* put a Stop to them. But he returned ſuch an Anſwer, as intimated the People to have been governed by a Divine Impulſe; and then,

11. *And the Multitude ſaid, This is Jeſus, the Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.*

12. *And Jeſus went into the Temple of God, and caſt out all them that ſold and bought in the Temple, and overthrew the Tables of the Money-changers, and the Seats of them that ſold Doves.*

12. Having ſuffered his Kingdom and Divine Authothority to be thus proclaimed by Others, he proceeds to exert it Himſelf. For he now purged the Temple (a ſecond Time, as he had done at another Paſſover three Years before) (of thoſe who kept a public Mart there, in the Court of

of the Gentiles. This they did for the Convenience of ſelling Birds and Beaſts for Sacrifice, and returning Money for ſuch as came from diſtant Parts of the Country up to this Feſtival.

13. Theſe he rebuked, by reminding them of the Prophet's Words, and ſo expoſing their Abuſe of that Holy Place. A Place deſigned for the Publick Worſhip, but converted by them into an open Market. Nor was it polluted by their Traffick only, but by the Injuſtice of the Gains they made there. Well therefore might they be accuſed on this Occaſion of making *God's Houſe* a Den of Thieves; ſince the Profit extorted by Fraud and Oppreſſion is no better than down-right Robbery, and the Exerciſe of ſuch Trades in a conſecrated Place, was ſo far from its primitive Inſtitution, that it made their Injuſtice to become Sacrilege.

13. *And ſaid unto them, It is written, My houſe ſhall be called an houſe of Prayer, but ye have made it a Den of Thieves.*

COMMENT.

THE Goſpel for this Day relates Two very remarkable Actions of our Bleſſed Saviour.

1. The *Firſt*, His ſolemn Entry into *Jeruſalem*.

2. The *Other*, His Behaviour in the Temple there.

The Latter of theſe I reſerve for that Account given of it by St. *Luke*, which will offer itſelf to our Conſideration hereafter; and at preſent will confine my Diſcourſe to the Former *only*. And here again there would ariſe ſeveral Reflections which I muſt be content to recommend to the Improvement of my Reader's private Meditation. Such as theſe that follow.

Goſpel for x *Sunday after* Trinity.

1. The Divine Knowledge and Power of our Bleſſed Lord. The former, in foretelling where, and in what Manner, his Diſciples ſhould find the Beaſts proper for his Purpoſe upon this Occaſion. The Latter, in inclining the Hearts of Perſons at a Diſtance, to ſo ready a Compliance with his Demands.

Ver. 2.

Ver. 3.

2. His Meekneſs and Condeſcenſion: In giving the Owners Satisfaction, and aſking their Conſent, that ſo

ſo no Man's Property might ſo much as ſeem to be invaded by any Order of his; tho' at the ſame time he were, in the ſtricteſt Senſe, what he ſtiles himſelf, *the Lord*, and had a Right antecedent and ſuperior to thoſe very Poſſeſſors, of whom he ſent to borrow.

3. The Chearful Obedience of theſe Diſciples to a Command, which carnal Reaſoning might have ſtarted many Objections againſt; and which nothing leſs than a ſtedfaſt Perſuaſion, that He, who ſent the Meſſage, would be ſure to give Succeſs to it, could have prevailed upon them to execute, as they did, without any Demur, or Delay.

Ver. 3. Mark xi. 5, 6. Luke xix. 33, 34.

4. The Myſtical Importance of theſe Beaſts; The One an Aſs inur'd to Burthens and Labour; the Other a Colt unbroken, *on which never Man had ſat*. By which we may underſtand, with * Some, The *Jews* long accuſtom'd to the *Moſaical* Yoke; and the *Gentiles*, who had hitherto walk'd in the Imaginations of their own Hearts, and (as St. *Paul* expreſſes it) *lived without God in the World*. Or elſe we may, with Others, apply the Paſſage to the Rational, and the Senſible, Principle, in every Man's Breaſt. For Either way the Parallel will hold: That even the rudeſt and wildeſt Heathens, even the moſt ſtubborn and unruly Paſſions, are made teachable and tame, when they ſubmit themſelves to Chriſt. And, as His Deſign was to unite all Nations in his Body; ſo when his Grace and Doctrine are our Guides, when he ſits Supreme and rules in all the Faculties of our Souls, then do our moſt Carnal Appetites move aright, and we march triumphantly, under his Direction, into the Heavenly *Jeruſalem*.

Luke xix. 30. * Chryſ. Tom. 5. Ser. 140. p. 83. Ed. Eton,

Epheſ. ii. 12. * Juſtin Mart. in Tryph. page 272. Ed. Paris 1636.

There is yet another Improvement, made by Some, of theſe Diſciples looſing the Aſs and the Colt: who take Occaſion from hence to treat of abſolving Sinners. But This, and

Catech. ad Paroch.

ſome

ſome other Inferences upon the Place, are ſo remote from what the Literal Senſe ſuggeſt, that I can hardly think them worth the mentioning. And even thoſe already mention'd, ought to give Place to the Three following Particulars, which I ſhall make the Subject of my preſent Diſcourſe. Now they are,

I. *Firſt*, The Time of this ſolemn Entry into *Jeruſalem*.

II. *Secondly*, The Circumſtances and Ceremonies peculiar to it. And,

III. *Thirdly*, The Significance of it, and the Ends ſerved by it.

I. The Time of this ſolemn Entry is very punctually fixed by St. *John*. He acquaints us, that *Six Days before the Paſſover* our Lord came to *Bethany*, and was there entertain'd at Supper; that *Lazarus*, whom he had lately raiſed from the Dead, dwelt there; and that he ſat at Meat with him: and afterwards he ſays, that on the next Day (the fifth before the Paſſover incluſive) *much People came forth to meet him, and took Branches of Palm-trees, and cried Hoſanna*; So conducting him into the Holy City, with all thoſe Demonſtrations of Joy and Reſpect, deſcribed at large in the Goſpel for this Day. Now herein we may diſcover a very remarkable Myſtery, by comparing this Action with the Old Law relating to the *Jewiſh* Paſſover. The firſt Circumſtance whereof is, That, on the *Tenth Day of the First Month*, the Paſchal Lamb ſhould be drawn out from the reſt of the Flock, in order to be ſlain the *Fourteenth* of the ſame Month. Our Lord's Approach then to *Jeruſalem* in this unuſual Manner anſwers, in point of Time, to the Separation of the Lamb, deſign'd for the Paſchal Sacrifice. The Gaiety and Pomp of this Approach agrees exactly with the Garlands, and Proceſſions, and Shouts, and other Marks of Joy, uſual (we are told) with the *Jewiſh*, and almoſt all People, in leading their Victims

John xii. 1, 2, 12, 13.

Exod. xii. 3, &c.

See Ainſw. *in* Exod. xii.

Victims to the Altar. So then, it was not without particular good Reaſon, that our Lord admitted theſe ſignificant Ceremonies, at ſo critical a Juncture. For to Any who obſerve things nicely, they will appear exceeding ſeaſonable and proper, for accompliſhing thoſe Figures and Types under the Levitical Diſpenſation, of which he was the intended End and Subſtance. This was the True, the Univerſal, the Only effectual Paſſover, which turn'd away the Wrath of God and his deſtroying Angel; which preſerves his People from the dire Effects of Sin and Vengeance, and works a perfect Reconciliation, by his precious Blood, for as many as are ſprinkled with and waſhed in it. This Lamb of God did therefore, on the Day appointed by *Moſes*, come forth from *Bethphage*, (a * Village belonging to the Prieſts, from whence the Beaſts reſerved for Sacrifice were drawn out, for the Service of the Temple) He came forth, a moſt Holy and Unblemiſhed Sacrifice, with all the chearful Pomp cuſtomary upon ſuch Occaſions, with all the Marks of Triumph, which became ſo Willing, ſo Beneficial, ſo Victorious a Death. A Death which alone fulfill'd what Others of this nature could but faintly repreſent; And at once ſubdued, thoſe hitherto inviſible Deſtroyers of Mankind, Guilt, and Hell, and Death. This Lamb might be truly ſaid, from all theſe Demonſtrations of Gladneſs, not ſo properly to be Led, as to Offer himſelf to the Slaughter. He had formerly declar'd, *No Man taketh my Life from me, but I lay it down of myſelf.* And, by theſe firſt Steps towards his Suffering, he ſhewed with what Reſolution he advanc'd to his laſt Conflict; with what Readineſs and Chearfulneſs of Mind he ſuffer'd. It is alſo obſerv'd by a Learned Author of our own Nation, that the High-Prieſt, ſome Days before the Solemnity of the Yearly Atonement, did ſeparate himſelf from his Family and all civil Converſation, the better to prepare for the

1 Cor. v. 8.

* Adricom. Theatr. Terr. Sanctæ.

John x. 18.

See Selden L. iii. de Synedr. *c.* 11. *p.* 7.

Bp. Patrick *on* Levit. xvi. 3.

Sacred Offices of that Seaſon; And, that he was then conducted from his own Houſe to the Temple, with great Pomp: To this our Lord's triumphant Entry into the Holy City might likewiſe allude; who, five Days before his Paſſion, was thus attended to the Temple, before his offering that Great Sacrifice of Himſelf, which expiated the Sins of the whole World.

My *Second* Obſervation regards the Circumſtances and Ceremonies peculiar to this Action. In which we ſhall find ſomewhat very diſtinguiſhing, both as To the Perſons who contributed to the Pomp of it, and as To the Manner of the Thing itſelf.

Luke xix. 1. The Perſons are deſcrib'd to have been a mix'd Multitude, conſiſting of Diſciples and Common People. Such as were mov'd to do thus, John xii. from the Doctrines and Miracles which they had heard and ſeen; and who, from a deep and reverend Senſe of our Lord's Divine Power, were very forward to pay him what Honour they could. St. *John* obſerves to this purpoſe, the more immediate Occaſion of their extraordinary Reſpect at Ver. 17, 18. this Time; *The People* (he ſays) *that was with him, when he called Lazarus out of his Grave, and raiſed him from the dead, bare record. For this cauſe alſo the People met him, for that they heard, that he had done this Miracle.* So that the Qualifications, chiefly remarkable in the Aſſiſters at this Ceremony, are not the Quality or outward Splendor, the Wealth or the Reputation, the Learning or the eminent Poſts: but the Sincerity and honeſt Zeal, the hearty Affection to Chriſt, and the firm Perſuaſion of his being the true Meſſias, with the wonderful Things he taught and did had wrought in their Minds. And Theſe to Him who is no Reſpecter of Perſons, who came to ſet up a Kingdom not of this World, render'd thoſe Tributes of Praiſe and Acknowledgment, from Men mean and inſignificant, as to any temporal Reſpects, more acceptable, more becoming his Character, more truly for his Ho-

nour than any diſſembled or intereſted Homage of Rulers or Rabbies, the Greateſt or the Wiſeſt of the Sanhedrim could have been. For external Advantages are of no Conſideration with God, while they want Good Diſpoſitions within to recommend them.

2. The Manner of this Solemnity was likewiſe very ſingular. Inſtead of numerous Guards and triumphal Chariots, and coſtly Preparations, we find only the Attendance of a vulgar and deſpiſed Crowd. The Perſon, for whom theſe Honours were deſign'd, riding in humble Poverty upon a borrow'd Aſs; and the Way before him not cover'd with Tapeſtry or rich Furniture, but ſtrew'd with Branches haſtily cut down from Trees, and the Garments of them who made up the Train. The Songs and Acclamations applied to this Occaſion, did not tell of bloody Battles fought, of Victories obtain'd at the expence of infinite Toil and Treaſure, of Countries miſerably harraſs'd, and reduc'd by Fire and Sword; but rehears'd the Mercies of God, long expected, and now fulfilled, in the peaceful Reign of the Meſſiah. That Son of *David*, who ſhould turn Men's *Swords into Plowſhares, and their Spears into Pruning Hooks*, by eſtabliſhing ſuch Laws, as (if duly obſerved) would effectually curb and quiet thoſe general Diſturbers of Mankind, Envy, and Avarice, and Ambition. Such as would ſettle the World in profound and perfect Tranquillity, upon Principles of Juſtice and Contentedneſs, invincible Meekneſs, and mutual Love. This therefore was a Pomp, in all its Parts ſo diſtant from thoſe of common Princes, that, in Compariſon of them, it might look almoſt like a Mock-Triumph. And we may truly ſay, that our Lord's Humility never appear'd in more diſtinguiſhing Characters than in this ſingle Inſtance of his ſeeming to take Greatneſs and State to himſelf. Accordingly we find an eminent Prophecy fulfilled herein, which had, ſome Ages before, pointed out the

Iſa. iv. Mic. ii.

Meſſiah, by an Approach to the Holy City, which had a Sort of Splendor peculiar to itſelf. Such as was never parallel'd by any other King: Such as expreſſed the Lowlineſs of his Mind, and the Meanneſs of his worldly Circumſtances, even while it ſet forth the Royalty of his Perſon. And hence no doubt it is, that St. *Matthew* took ſuch Care to remind the *Jews* of that memorable Prediction. Thus challenging them, as it were, to produce any Example of its being duly accompliſh'd, except in the Perſon and by this Action, of Our *Jeſus*. *All this was done*, ſays he, *that it might be fulfilled, which was ſpoken by the Prophet*, &c. Which is in effect to argue thus: If *Zechariah* did (as the *Jews* confeſs he did) by the King in that Prophecy intend the promiſed Meſſias; then the Meſſias muſt come to *Jeruſalem* in ſuch a Manner as anſwers the Deſcription: But *Jeſus* did, and no other Perſon ever did, diſtinguiſh himſelf by coming to *Jeruſalem* in this Manner: Therefore *Jeſus*, and no other, is the true Meſſias, whom that Prophet had in view. And thus I am, almoſt unawares, got within the Compaſs of my Third Particular, which is,

Ver. 5. Zech. ix. 9.

III. The Significance of, and the End ſerved by, this Action. The Evangeliſt indeed takes expreſs Notice of no other End, than the utmoſt and exact Completion, which it was neceſſary that Prophecy ſhould meet with; But I think, we may very reaſonably conclude, that ſome other Purpoſes of great Importance were ſerved by it. Particularly theſe that follow:

1. Theſe Honours were of uſe to vindicate our Lord's Innocence, and to do right to his Character, by leaving reſpectful Impreſſions of him upon Mens Minds, at a Time ſo Critical as this, which immediately preceded the Ignominy of his Crucifixion. At a former Paſſover, when the People, in Admiration of his Miracles, would have paid him Kingly Honours, he withdrew, and refuſed that unſeaſonable Teſtimony of their

John vi. 15.

their Zeal. Partly (as we may properly conjecture) becauſe their Eagerneſs had a Mixture of worldly Conſiderations in it; and partly, becauſe the accepting thoſe Honours then, would have been liable to Miſinterpretation, and might have obſtructed the Efficacy of his Preaching. But now the Courſe of his Prophetick Office was finiſhed; Now the People proceeded upon other Motives; and therefore he offers himſelf to be treated, as became their Conviction of his Divine Power and Truth. And, (as he afterwards confeſſed before *Pilate*, ſo) he now ſuffers them publickly to acknowledge and proclaim, his Royal Dignity. And thus he thought fit to do; As for other Reaſons, ſo perhaps not leaſt of all for This, that theſe free and ſolemn Acknowledgments might be for a Balance againſt the Shame and Scandal of his Croſs. And an Over-balance they will be, with judicious and impartial Conſiderers; When it is obſerved, that his Death was the Contrivance of a reſtleſs Party, enraged with Envy and Malice, obſtinately prejudic'd by Secular Intereſt, and jealous of his growing Greatneſs in the Eſteem of the People; But that, on the other hand, theſe Pomps and Acclamations were the Effect of great Sincerity, and an honeſt Reverence for one, who, they verily believed, had fully anſwered all the noble Predictions concerning the Meſſias; One, who muſt of neceſſity be that very Perſon, ſo long promis'd, ſo impatiently expected, ſo punctually deſcribed by the Ancient Prophets. This Opinion and Behaviour in the People was the natural Effect of Chriſt's Actions and Doctrine. The ſame they would have had upon all who ſaw and heard them, had all who ſaw and heard, but conſider'd them as theſe diſintereſted Men did; without the blinding of Paſſion, or the Biaſs of worldly and private Reſpects. Thus it appear'd, that all the barbarous Indignities put upon *Jeſus*, afterwards did not ſpeak the general Senſe of the *Jewiſh* Nation, but only

Ch. xxvii. 11. John xviii. 36, 37.

ſhew'd the ſpight of a governing Faction. Nor ought there any great Streſs to be laid upon the Multitudes, which were then drawn into a Compliance with their Superiors. Since the ſubtle Management of Men in Poſt and Power, and the Eaſineſs and Servile Fears uſual in thoſe of a mean depending Condition, make ſuch ſudden Changes not at all ſurprizing. Nor is it new to find even the Conſciences of the Vulgar in perpetual Bondage to thoſe great Maſters, whoſe Tyranny expects to have their very Souls at its Devotion. And therefore Mens Judgments and Inclinations are never to be known by their Behaviour, when any ſuch Checks are upon them; But muſt be meaſured by what they do (as in the Caſe before us) when at their own Diſpoſal; when under no Influence from the Example of their Superiors; nor in any Apprehenſions of Diſpleaſure, if they do not follow Them to do Evil.

2. As this Solemn Entry was a Declaration of Chriſt's Kingdom, So the Circumſtances peculiar to it were very Significant Intimations, of what Nature and Quality that Kingdom ſhould be. Not one of this World, nor of any Affinity to ſuch, whoſe Pomps were ſo very unlike thoſe of Earthly Princes, that They only who behold them with an Eye of Faith, can diſcern any thing of Splendor and true Greatneſs in them. This Inauguration was but a more formal Introduction to the Death of the King celebrated by it. And the Perſons, and Methods, and every Part in it were (as I ſaid before) ſo many Marks of Poverty, and Humility, and Meekneſs, Neglect and Contempt of the World and its Gaieties. This Throne was erected in the Hearts of Men; and its Excellence conſiſted, not in the Figure or the Numbers, but in Virtues and Holy Diſpoſitions, of its Subjects. And certainly our Bleſſed Lord could not have taken a more effectual Courſe for refuting and correcting that vain Imagination of the Meſſiah's Earthly Dominion, at his firſt Coming, than by ordering Matters ſo, that this only Inſtance

of

of his receiving Princely Honours, ſhould be ſo directly oppoſite to the Cuſtomary Forms of Triumphs, and Inaugurations, among Temporal Princes: And then, by permitting ſuch reproachful Treatment, ſuch barbarous Cruelty, ſuch Pain and Suffering, ſuch univerſal Inſolence and Scorn, to prevail againſt him, in that Paſſion and Crucifixion, to which this Proceſſion was, as it were, the Preface and firſt ſetting out. For,

3. Another End ſerved by theſe uncommon Reſpects, paid to our Bleſſed Saviour at that Time, was the miniſtring freſh Matter, for the Malice of his Enemies to work upon, and opening a more direct Paſſage to his bitter and ignominious Death. St. *Peter* obſerves moſt truly, that *Jeſus* was delivered up to Death by *the Council and Foreknowledge* of God; Acts ii. 23. and that nothing paſſed in this whole Matter, but what his Almighty Wiſdom *had before determin'd to be done.* Acts iv. 28. But ſtill They, who conſpired that Death of his, were left to their own Devices, and acted upon Principles and Choice ſo free, that the whole was brought about by human and ordinary Means. It is one marvellous Inſtance of the Divine Wiſdom and Power, to permit the Unrighteouſneſs of Men without any juſt Imputation of the Guilt contracted by it: And then to make thoſe Sins, which are not thought fit to be reſtrain'd, inſtrumental to excellent Purpoſes. Purpoſes altogether unknown to the Actors, and foreign to, nay, ſometimes deſtructive of, their Deſigns in committing them. And never was the Glory of theſe Attributes more eminently illuſtrated, than in the Sufferings of our dear Redeemer. God had indeed ordain'd, that his innocent Son ſhould die by the inveterate Malice and Barbarity of the *Jews:* but That Malice and Barbarity were entirely their own. And therefore the Apoſtle, who mentions the *Council* and *Determination of God*, as to the Event; Acts ii. 23. does not forbear, as to the Quality of the Fact, to pronounce thoſe Hands *Wicked*, by which the

Holy Jeſus *was Crucified and Slain.* Now, the Reaſon of this is obvious. For thoſe very Actions of our Lord, which ſhould have won the *Jews* over to a Belief of and Reverence for him, were by their Prejudice and Envy ſo perverted, as to become ſo many freſh Provocations to their Malice, for haſtening his intended Deſtruction. Thus the Miracle upon *Lazarus* in particular, which (as was ſhewed before) put the unpreposſeſſed Multitudes upon celebrating the Glories of this Mighty Prophet, had a quite different Operation upon the jealous Rulers. For, *from that Day forward they took Council together to put him to Death.* Nor did their Spight ſtop there; But, enrag'd at the Influence this Miracle had upon the People, they were for removing out of the way, that very Perſon, who was the living Teſtimony of it; and *conſulted to put Lazarus alſo to Death*; *Becauſe that by reaſon of him, many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jeſus.* We are not much to wonder, if Men, ſo unreaſonably bent upon Miſchief, were exaſperated, upon every Expreſſion of Inclination and Zeal, for ſo hated a Rival in the Affections of the People. And hence it was, that the Pomp and Acclamations of this Day's Goſpel, however mean and deſpicable in themſelves, yet meeting with Minds already inflamed and ſore, galled them to that implacable Degree, implied in that Reflection upon them, *perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold the World is gone after him.* This quickened them in their Meaſures, and confirmed them in the *Expedience of his dying for the People*, in that wicked Senſe, intended by *Caiaphas.* And accordingly, two Days after, they ſtrike up their Bargain with *Judas* to betray him. Thus our Lord, who foreſaw every Conſequence diſtinctly, ſuffered the officious Reſpects of a well-meaning Multitude, to draw on his Paſſion; by exaſperating his Blood-thirſty Enemies, and rendering them more vigorous

John xi. 53.

John xii. 10, 11.

John xii. 19.

Matt. xxvi. 2, 3.

gorous and impatient, in the Execution of their villainous Deſigns.

4. I can by no means think it unreaſonable to believe, that our Lord admitted of theſe Honours from the People, as he did the coſtly Ointment the * Day before, not merely for the Value of the things themſelves, but in a great meaſure for the Myſteries repreſented by them. The Ceremonies and *Hoſannah*'s, applied to *Jeſus* upon this Occaſion, ſeem more peculiarly to have belonged to the † Feaſt of Tabernacles. A Feſtival, inſtituted to commemorate the *Iſraelites* dwelling in Tents or Booths, when they came up out of the Land of *Ægypt*. * But, if we allow any ſuch Typical Importance in This, as the Scriptures expreſly attribute to ſome other *Jewiſh* Feſtivals; When could thoſe Boughs, thoſe Praiſes and Prayers, be ſo fitly, ſo ſignificantly uſed, as in Honour to this † *Stem out of the Root of Jeſſe:* To that Righteous Servant, whoſe Name is * the *Branch*; To that Son of God, who (as the Evangeliſt expreſſes it) ‖ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, vouchſafed to pitch his Tent among Men; to dwell in a *Tabernacle* of Human Fleſh; and who therefore was now celebrated with *Hoſanna*'s, upon ſo many Accounts his own.

* *Comp.* John xii. 3. & 12.

† Levit. xxiii. 30, 40. *Ainſw.* in. loc.

* 1 Cor. v. 8.

† Iſai. xi. 1.

* Zech. iii. 8. vi. 12.

‖ John i. 14.

Again, In regard our Lord himſelf declares, that *Mary anointed* his Body to the Burial, tho' it does not certainly appear to us, that ſhe had any ſuch End of that Action in view at the time of doing it; What ſhould hinder us from inferring, by Parity of Reaſon, that theſe Multitudes, and all their triumphant Pomp, (tho' not by them deſign'd for ſuch a Purpoſe) were a Type and Prelude, of our Lord's Reſurrection, and Aſcenſion to the Right Hand of God? Nay, to that more glorious and more triumphant Pomp of the General Judgment? For then ſhall

Matt. xxvi. 12. John xii. 7.

ſhall this, once meek and humble, King come with the Attendance, not of young Children and a vulgar Train, but Troops of Angels and Bleſſed Spirits innumerable. In a Figure, as becoming an Univerſal Conqueror and Lord; as this before us was ſuitable to the Character and Condeſcenſion of a ſuffering Saviour. Then ſhall the Shouts of Heavenly Hoſts awaken the whole World from their Sleep of Death: And ſtrike his Enemies with a Terror and Confuſion, to which the Conſternations, upon this Approach to *Jeruſalem*, bear ſome, tho' but a feeble, Reſemblance. And indeed theſe ſeem ſuch Meditations, as the Church deſign'd to carry our Thoughts forward to, in a more eſpecial Manner, by introducing, with this Portion of Scripture, a Seaſon of more than ordinary Devotion; The Two great Uſes whereof are, to diſpoſe us for commemorating our Lord's Firſt, and to aſſiſt us in making due Preparation for his Second, *Advent*.

Now to this Preparation ſomewhat conſiderable may be contributed, by thoſe many practical Inferences, which naturally reſult from the foregoing Particulars. I inſtance at preſent in theſe *Four* only.

1. The Example of our Bleſſed Maſter, advancing ſo chearfully towards his Sufferings, ſhould animate and confirm all his Diſciples, in taking up their Croſs, when it ſhall pleaſe God at any Time to lay it before them. It ſhould fortify them againſt ſuch Sufferings eſpecially, as more directly tend to the Service of the Truth, and to the Benefit of their Brethren. Nor ought it in thoſe Caſes to damp our Reſolution and Zeal, that we ſuffer wrongfully, or for Them, who have not merited well at our Hands. For in theſe Reſpects, above all, is the Bleſſed Jeſus our Pattern; who was ſo well contented to be betray'd into the Hands of wicked Men, and to die upon a Croſs, *the Juſt for the Unjuſt. He who knew no Sin, was made Sin for us, that we might be made the Righteouſneſs of God*

1 Pet. iii. 18.

God in Him: And, except we endure not only patiently, but even contentedly and gladly, when the Honour of God, and the Salvation of our Souls, are like to be the Conſequence of our Afflictions; we do by no means copy after him, *who hath herein left us an Example, that we ſhould follow his Steps.* [2 Cor. v. 21.] [1 Pet. ii. 21.]

2. Well were it, if the Circumſtances peculiar to this Action were ſo conſider'd, as to regulate Mens Behaviour, when Honour, and Greatneſs, and Fame, endanger their Prudence and their Virtue. If they would prevail for ſuch a Deportment, even in the moſt ſhineing Merit, even in the moſt exalted Station, that their Humility and Conſtancy of Mind might never ceaſe to be conſpicuous. If, even in their gayeſt Intervals, they would admit ſeaſonable Reflections, *That* they are moving towards Death apace; *That* the Condition of Human Nature allows but a ſhort Enjoyment of theſe Advantages, putting the very beſt of the Caſe; *That* they are exceeding apt to cut themſelves yet ſhorter, by ſetting an Edge upon the Envy of Others, and irritating the Malice of jealous Competitors, to haſten the Deſtruction, and riſe upon the Ruins of Men better and more eſteemed than themſelves: In a Word, Would ſuch but mortify their Vanity, by obſerving the Worthleſneſs, the Inſtability, of Popular Applauſe and Public Reſpects, which they are ſo prone to be blown up, and turn'd giddy with. The Paſſage before us demonſtrates how falſe a Confidence we place in theſe Advantages; what very Reeds the Affections of the People are; and how they bend to every Wind, of Faction, and Intereſt and malicious Inſinuation, even when moſt Zealous, even when moſt Sincere. For what Security can any one have, that theſe Affections ſhall be conſtant to him, when this moſt Innocent, moſt Inoffenſive Perſon; This beſt Benefactor to Mankind, whom his moſt inveterate Enemies could not convince of any Sin, did yet, after ſo many Miracles of Mercy, find theſe deſerved *Hoſanna*'s changed

changed in five Days time, into thoſe cauſeleſs, thoſe importunate Clamours, *Crucify him, Crucify him, Away with this Man, and releaſe unto us Barabbas?*

Luke xxiii. 18, 21.

3. The different Behaviour of the Rulers, from that of the Common People, upon this Occaſion, ſhould be a Warning to Us, that we ſuffer not any Perſon, or private Reſpects, to biaſs us in Matters of Religion. For the Reſentments, ſo directly contrary, of the Miracle by which *Lazarus* was raiſed from the Dead, ſhew what unequal Judges of Men and Things Prejudice and Intereſt are; And that the Succeſs of the beſt Doctrine, and moſt ſufficient Evidence, will turn at laſt upon the Diſpoſition of the Perſons, to whom they are propoſed. Thus it muſt needs be in the nature of the Thing. Moral Perſuaſions cannot act mechanically and neceſſarily; but muſt, in order to their Efficacy, pre-ſuppoſe a Mind honeſt and free, willing to hearken and ſubmit to Reaſon. And thus it is alſo in the Caſe of Chriſtianity in particular. There is no one Point of Faith and Practice but it may be, and hath been, abundantly vindicated, from all the Exceptions that lie againſt it. The chief Cauſe, why Truth is not univerſally received, is, that all Men do not come to the Conſideration of it, with a Spirit of Meekneſs, and Love of the Truth. And Error and Vice prevail, not from any Subſtance and Solidity of their own, ſo much as from that dead Weight of corrupt Inclinations, which Men bring along with them, and caſt into the Scale. The diſtant Opinions about the ſame Things proceed, from Men, not ſeeing with the ſame Eyes, and under the ſame Proſpects. Some judge impartially, Others are bribed and blinded. And, though no Man is wittingly deceived; yet many contribute to their own Deceit, by uſing falſe Meaſures, which Cuſtom, or Advantage, or ſome other perſonal Reſpect, impoſes upon them for juſt and true. St. *James* hath therefore preſcribed the right Method, firſt *to put*

put away all Filthineſs and Superfluity of Naughtineſs, and then to receive the ingrafted Word, which (ſo and only ſo) *is able to ſave our Souls.* But, James i. 21.

4. The Impreſſions, I am principally deſirous to leave upon my Reader, are ſuch, as regard the future Coming of our Lord, prefigured by that of this Day's Goſpel. And in this Type, We all ſhall find Subject for our Imitation. Theſe Multitudes came out to meet Jeſus riding on an Aſs; but the ſame Jeſus ſhall one Day *make the Clouds his Chariot, and ride upon the Heavens as it were upon an Horſe.* Pſal. xviii. 68. They ſang the Praiſes of the Son of *David*, to a City who would not receive him as ſuch; But He, who hath already demonſtrated himſelf to be that promiſed *Son of David*, ſhall then come to convince the unbelieving World, that he is the very *Son of God.* And We, like Them, ſhould all go forth to meet him. Like Them, I ſay, with the Sincerity of Diſciples, with the Innocence of Children. Let Us, like them, cut down the *Branches* from our Trees, thoſe Worldly Vanities and Carnal Affections; which, like luxuriant Boughs, muſt be lopp'd off, and caſt under the Feet of this Heavenly King, by ſtooping to his Holy Diſcipline. Let Us too *ſpread* our Hearts, as *They their Garments*; that every Faculty, and every Thought, may be ſubject to his Dominion; and labour to adorn the Body of this Myſtical Head, the Church and Doctrine of Chriſt. So ſhall this Cloathing of Fleſh, which muſt ſhortly be put off, be reſumed again with Joy; And from a *Veſſel of Honour and Sanctification here*, become his Attendant and Companion *into the Heavenly Jeruſalem.* So ſhall we be qualified to bear our Part, in the moſt exalted Senſe of theſe Hymns and Acclamations; and in that Day of Salvation, ſhout forth with Gladneſs and Thankſgiving unſpeakable, *Bleſſed be the King that cometh in the Name of the Lord.* Yea, Bleſſed be he that cometh, Not to ſuffer, but to reign; not to redeem, but to recompenſe.

Hoſanna to the Meek Son of *David*! *Hoſanna* to the Glorious Majeſty of the Son of God! Bleſſed be the Kingdom, which is come to rule our Hearts by Grace! Bleſſed be the Kingdom that cometh to reward our Obedience with Glory. *Bleſſed be our Peace, who died unto Sin once! Bleſſed be our Righteouſneſs who liveth for ever unto God.* *Hoſanna* to him, who came to *Jeruſalem*, to be judged in great Humility! *Hoſanna* to Him, who cometh with terrible Pomp to judge both the Quick and the Dead. *Hoſanna in the Higheſt.*

Eph. ii. 14.
Rom. vi. 10.
Jer. xxiii. 5, 6.
1 Cor. i. 30.

The Second Sunday in Advent.

The COLLECT.

BLeſſed Lord, who haſt cauſed all holy Scriptures to be written for our Learning: Grant that we may in ſuch wiſe hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digeſt them; that by Patience and Comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold faſt the bleſſed Hope of everlaſting Life, which thou haſt given us in our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt. *Amen.*

Rom. xv. 4.

The EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE.

Rom. xv. 4.

4. The Hiſtory and Prophecies of the Old Teſtament are written for the Benefit of us, who live under the New.

4. *WHatſoever things were written aforetime, were written for our Learning; that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.*

That by obſerving what happen'd to pious Perſons heretofore, and to others ſince, of whom they are Types, we might be excited to the like Virtue and Conſtancy, by the ſupporting Expectation of the like Rewards for our Sufferings.

5. And may the ſame God, who ſuſtain'd them with his holy Comforts, en-

5. *Now the God of Patience and Conſolation grant you to be like-minded one towards another according to Chriſt Jeſus.*

due

due Us with a Spirit of Meekneſs and Forbearance, of which Chriſt Jeſus above all others, hath left us both a Command and a Pattern.

6. *That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.*

6. That we may preſerve a true Chriſtian Communion in Heart and Affection, as well as in Voice and * outward Form; and perfectly agree in joint Endeavours to promote the Honour of that God, who under the Goſpel, is diſtinguiſh'd by that peculiar Title, *The Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.*

* *Grot. in locum.*

7. *Wherefore receive ye one another, as Chriſt alſo received us, to the glory of God.*

7. And great Reaſon there is, why Jew and Gentile Converts ſhould bear with each Other, and not break Communion, for Infirmities, and different Notions in Matters of leſs Concern; when it is conſider'd how kind and condeſcending Chriſt himſelf hath been to both thoſe ſorts of Men.

8. *Now I ſay, that Chriſt Jeſus was a miniſter of the Circumciſion for the truth of God to confirm the Promiſes made unto the Fathers.*

8. If the Gentiles be apt to deſpiſe the Jews, let them remember, that This People only had the Privilege of Chriſt's Preſence and perſonal Miniſtry among them: and that, by Virtue of ſolemn Promiſes, by which God hath bound himſelf to their Anceſtors, whom he choſe, out of all the Kindreds of the Earth, to make them his own Peculiar.

9. *And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his Mercy, as it is written, For this Cauſe will I confeſs to thee among the Gentiles, and unto thy Name.*

10. *And again he ſaith, Rejoice ye Gentiles with his people.*

9. Again, if the *Jews* be tempted to ſcorn the *Gentiles*, let them reflect, that, though theſe were not under the ſame formal covenant, yet God thought them worth taking in, even without any previous Engagement to do ſo. And of this many expreſs Predictions are extant in the *Jewiſh* Prophets.

11. *And again, Praiſe the Lord, all ye Gentiles, and laud him, all ye People.*

11. For when theſe join the Gentiles with Jews, or call upon the Gentiles to join in Praiſe for ſpiritual Mercies, (as *David* does) it is imply'd, that they ſhould partake in the Bleſſings

ſings they are to praiſe God for. And this is the Strain, in which not only *David* (who ſpeaks in the Perſon of Chriſt) but *Moſes* long before, accoſted the Heathen Nations in.

12. And *Iſaiah* deſcribes the *Meſſiah*, as an univerſal Monarch, to whoſe victorious Standard all People ſhall flock, and with great Security commit themſelves to his Government and Protection. Since therefore Both are received, Both ſhould reſpect and receive one another into Communion and Friendſhip, and unite in the ſame common Deſign, of promoting Religion, and proſecuting the ſame Hope.

12. *And again, Eſaias ſaith, There ſhall be a root of Jeſſe, and he that ſhall riſe to reign over the Gentiles, in him ſhall the Gentiles truſt.*

13. And may God, the Giver of this Hope, grant you all to agree in the true Faith, compoſe your Differences, and inſpire that Charity and mutual Forbearance, which alone can juſtify this Hope. For as this can be wrought in our Hearts only by God's own Spirit, ſo the Comforts of it belong to, and are enjoyed by none, who are not of a peaceable and meek Diſpoſition.

13. *Now the God of Hope fill you with all Joy and Peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghoſt.*

COMMENT.

IN order to make a due Improvement of this Scripture, Three Things, I conceive, are neceſſary.

I. *Firſt, To explain the immediate Occaſion of it.*

II. *Secondly, To conſider the Deſign and Importance of the Apoſtle's Argument, with regard to that particular Occaſion.* And then,

III. *Thirdly, To bring the Matter home by ſuch Inferences, as may render it of uſe to ourſelves, and to all Chriſtians in general.*

I. I begin with the *Immediate Occaſion*, upon which this Portion of Scripture was at firſt deliver'd. For a right underſtanding whereof, we muſt obſerve that the Church of *Rome* was made up of mixt Converts, Some of whom came over to the Chriſtian Faith from *Jewiſh* and Others from Heathen, Principles. The former

continued

continued to obſerve, and pay great Veneration to, the Ceremonial Law of *Moſes*. Not having yet vanquiſhed the Prejudice of Education and Cuſtom, nor attained to a perfect underſtanding of that Liberty, which the Goſpel allows to every Chriſtian with reſpect to Matters in their own Nature Indifferent. And thoſe Perſons, upon the Account of that Defect in their Judgment, are call'd *Weak in the Faith*. The Others, who had Ch. xiv. 1. juſter Apprehenſions of this Point, made no difference in *Meats*, or *Days*, or any ſuch Levitical Ordinances; but acted with all the Freedom becoming Men, who were duly ſenſible, that the New Covenant had ſet them at large from the Reſtraint of any ſuch Diſtinctions. And Theſe, becauſe rightly informed, and thoroughly ſatisfied in their own Breaſts, that what they did the Goſpel would bear them out in, are term'd the *Strong*. Now, had each of theſe Sorts Ch. xv. 1. contented themſelves, with governing their own Behaviour by their own Principles, without cenſuring and condemning thoſe of a contrary Principle; they might ſtill have thought and acted differently, and yet no harm had been done. But that which divided the Church, diſhonour'd God, and weakened the common Cauſe, was that the *Strong* reproached the *Weak*, as Superſtitious and Silly: And the *Weak* abhorred the *Strong*, as Irreligious and Profane. To heal this Breach effectually, the Apoſtle had plied both Parties with great Variety of Arguments, in the XIVth Chapter; And here in the XVth, he addreſſes to them of ſounder Judgment particularly, exhorting thoſe to Compaſſion for their Brethrens honeſt, though miſtaken Zeal; and to ſuch Allowances for their Infirmities, as might preſerve an Unity in Affection, where that in Opinion could not be attained to.

The laſt and higheſt Motive reſerved for this Purpoſe, is taken from the Example of our Saviour Chriſt, Who, for our Benefit, ſubmitted to many things harſh and very grievous to him. In Proof of

this he urges a Paſſage out of the Pſalms, wherein *David* complains that the hard things ſaid and done againſt God, were levell'd at, and endur'd by Him. But, if this were true of *David*, in his own Perſon, and his private Capacity; it was much more ſo of him, in his Prophetical and Typical Capacity: For Chriſt, whoſe Perſon *David* thus ſuſtain'd, did not only ſuffer the Reproaches of God's Enemies, but ſuffer'd for them too, and bore the Puniſhment and the Malice of them both. And, * to juſtify the Application of this Text to our Lord, the Apoſtle begins the Epiſtle for this Day, with Reflections of general uſe for rightly underſtanding and improving by the Writings of the Old Teſtament. *Whatſoever things*, &c. Intimating that the Relations of Good Mens Sufferings, and other Matters contain'd there, were not barely an Hiſtorical Account of Actions and Events already paſs'd, but Shadows and Significations of Others yet to come. And the Uſe we ought to make of them is, from the Examples of thoſe Holy Perſons, but eſpecially of *Jeſus*, the moſt abſolute and perfect of all Examples, to ſupport our Spirit, and confirm our Reſolution, with the Proſpect of a like glorious Recompence, for any Inconvenience we ſhall ſubmit to, for the Sake of God's Honour, and the Service of our Brethren. Thus much, I think, may ſuffice to explain the immediate Occaſion of this Scripture; and ſhall therefore proceed now to the

* Grot in loc.

Ver. 4.

II. *Second* Thing propounded, *The Deſign and Importance of the Apoſtle's Argument, with regard to the Caſe of the Perſons then conſider'd in it.*

The Deſign he drives at we have in that Prayer, that God would bring thoſe Chriſtians of differing Judgments, to be *like minded one towards another, according to Chriſt Jeſus*; that is, to ſuch a due Temper, ſuch mutual Kindneſs, ſuch charitable Behaviour, that the Obſervers of thoſe Le-

Ver. 5.

gal Ordinances might no longer *deſpiſe* them, who were well aſſured they were under no Obligation to continue the Obſervance of them: And that They, who in this Perſuaſion obſerved them not, might leave off their hard Cenſures of thoſe, who, for want of better Information, thought themſelves ſtill bound by them. That ſo by ſuch profitable Condeſcenſions on either Side, as Chriſt hath left both a Precept, and Pattern for, they would lay down all Party-Quarrels, and heartily join in Communion together. And, for apprehending the Force and Reaſonableneſs of this Advice, we ſhall do well to attend to Two Things.

1. The Strength of that Motive, whereby he expreſly urges them to it, *The Example of our Saviour Chriſt.*

2. The excellent Effects like to be produced by it. And theſe again are Two. (1.) The Glory accruing to God by this Charity and mutual Forbearance, *That ye may glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.* And again, *Receive ye one another, as Chriſt alſo received Us, to the Glory of God.* (2.) The publick Good of the Church. For thus much is hinted in that concluding Prayer, where he begs of God *to fill them with all Joy and Peace in believing, that they might abound in Hope, through the Power of the Holy Ghoſt.*

Ver. 6. Ver. 7.

Ver. 13.

1. *Firſt* then, For the Motive whereby this Agreement is urged. *The Example of Chriſt.* The Propriety whereof will more fully appear, if we regard the Perſons between whom this Controverſy lay; and eſpecially, that ſort of them, to whom the Apoſtle more particularly addreſſes himſelf, in this Part of his Diſcourſe, now under Conſideration.

The Parties concern'd were Jewiſh and Gentile Converts, or, according to St. *Paul*'s Stile elſewhere, *ſuch as lived after the manner of the Jews, and ſuch as lived as do the Gentiles.* Which

Gl. ii. 14.

laſt Diſtinction I the rather mention; becauſe, though it be not very probable, that any Gentile Converts thought themſelves in Bondage to the Ceremonial Laws of *Moſes*; yet it is by no means manifeſt, that none at all among the Jewiſh Converts were convinced of their Releaſe from that Bondage. It is enough for the Apoſtle's Purpoſe, that this Prejudice was general, though not univerſal. And the Subſtance of his Reaſoning may be compriſed in this. Chriſt did not reject either Jew or Gentile, but united both to himſelf, by admitting them as Members into the ſame Myſtical Body: and the Honour of God was greatly illuſtrated by this kind Condeſcenſion. The Perſons therefore thus highly favoured, thus cloſely incorporated, could not do better, than to remember, and to copy after, the Goodneſs of their common Saviour and Head. It would ill become Them to diſdain or caſt out thoſe from their Charity, whom Chriſt did not ſhut out from his Mercy. Eſpecially ſince this whole Matter was ſo order'd, that each of theſe had Privileges peculiar to themſelves; which ought in Reaſon to ſet the one ſort above the Other's Contempt. The *Jew* cannot be thought deſpicable, ſince Chriſt himſelf confin'd the Honour of his Preſence, and the Exerciſe of his Prophetick Office upon Earth, to this People and Perſuaſion only: Since God looked upon them as his Own, by a title diſtinct from the reſt of Mankind: Since he gave them the Option as it were, and engaged, that to Theſe firſt Salvation ſhould be ſent. The *Gentiles*, 'tis confeſs'd, had no ſuch Claims or Covenants to produce; But yet, ſo tender Regard had God for them too, as to make them Partners in the Goſpel-Grace. And the leſs Ground theſe had to expect it, the more ſurpriſingly great was the Kindneſs that beſtowed it. Thus was God glorified in reſpect of Both. His

Ver. 8. Juſtice and *Truth* were conſpicuous in receiving the *Jews* according to Promiſe;

and his *Mercy* and Goodneſs were eminently ſo, in receiving the *Gentiles* without the like Promiſe. Both then were taken in, and if not both upon an equal Foot, yet what was done freely is as evident a Demonſtration of Love, as what was done to make good an Antecedent Engagement. Though in very Deed, if we drive the Point a little higher, Both owe their Acceptance to God's Grace entirely: for even the binding himſelf by Promiſe was God's own free Act. And therefore the Reaſon holds Good, that Perſons thus equall'd, in the Favour of God, and the Benefits of the Chriſtian Diſpenſation, ſhould by no means deſpiſe or caſt off one another; but imitate an Example, to which all their own Happineſs is owing; by mutual Compaſſion, and a very tender Regard for each other's ſpiritual Advantage, and that Glory of God, which Both ſorts profeſs to make their common End, though they are not agreed by what Methods it is beſt advanced. And therefore Each endeavour'd it in his own Way, and took ſuch Meaſures, as himſelf judg'd moſt expedient. Ver. 9.

This Reaſoning from the Example of our Bleſſed Saviour receives yet greater Enforcement, if we attend to the Perſons, before whom this Model is ſet, to ſquare their own Actions by. Now they are the *Strong* Men, ſuch as were rightly appriſed of their Chriſtian Liberty, and perfectly ſatisfied in the Uſe of it. Admitting then their Opinion of the Matters in Diſpute to be moſt juſt, and the Aſperſions caſt upon their Conduct hard and undeſerv'd; the Effect of Ignorance, nay, of inveterate Prejudice; yet, ought not the Soundneſs of their own Judgment, or the ill Treatment they met with from their *Weaker* Brethren, either to make the Breach wider, or ſo much as to keep it open between them? For, What Compariſon can be made between the Attainments of even the ſtrongeſt Chriſtians Ver. 1, 2.

above the *Weakeſt*, and the Perfections of Chriſt above the very *Strongeſt?* What Account can be made of the bittereſt, the moſt unjuſt *Reproaches* between One Man and Another, by Any who reflects at all upon that perpetual, that virulent *Contradiction of Sinners*, which the Holy Jeſus *endured againſt himſelf?* If then the Miſery, the wretched Darkneſs, the grievous, the numberleſs Provocations of *Jews* and *Gentiles* Both, did not ſo alienate His Affections from Either, but that he condeſcended in marvellous Compaſſion to receive Both into Grace: ſhall any of the Perſons ſo undeſervedly receiv'd diſdain and damn one the other, for diſagreeing about Matters in their own Nature *indifferent?* Shall they be more ſevere, more implacable, for mere Defects, and innocent Miſtakes, to Men of the ſame Frame, and upon a Level with themſelves; than their God and Saviour hath ſhew'd himſelf, for wilful and deliberate Offences, to which a ſimple Error in Judgment bears no manner of Proportion? If ſome diſſenting Perſons had by an inconſiderate Zeal been tranſported, beyond the Bounds of Charity and Moderation, yet the Honeſty of their Intentions might be allowed in abatement for their Faults. Their Ignorance ſhould rather move Pity than Anger, and their very worſt Indiſcretions find an eaſy Pardon, with Them, who had already been pardon'd many more, and much greater Follies. The uſe of better Knowledge is not to deſpiſe and condemn, but in *Meekneſs to inſtruct* and edify thoſe who, for want of it, *oppoſe themſelves* When the Head vouchſafes to cheriſh the inferior Members, thoſe Members ſhould not do Deſpight to, and bear hard upon, one another. And ſince He, who is *Strength* in the Abſtract, did not think it beneath him to relieve and graciouſly accept our Weakneſſes; They, whoſe very beſt Strength is but *Weakneſs*, muſt not be ſo exalted with a fond Conceit of this, as not to bear with the Infirmities of Men,

2 Tim. ii. 25.

Men, in ſome little Meaſure weaker than themſelves. In ſhort, the whole Scheme of our Redemption, and every Action of the Bleſſed Jeſus, is an Admonition to all His Diſciples, that they ought greatly to humble and deny themſelves, in Tenderneſs to others. And therefore no Chriſtian anſwers his Character, who ſo abounds in his own Senſe, as not, upon ſome Occaſions, to depart from his Right, and make Allowances for the Failings and Miſapprehenſions of his Fellow-Chriſtians. So far, I mean, as this may conduce to the preſerving of Charity, to the Advantage of Religion in common, to the Peace and Benefit of differing Parties, and to the Honour of Almighty God: All which may be much illuſtrated and advanced by mutual Condeſcenſions. And thus I am brought to the Other Branch of the Apoſtle's Argument;

2. The excellent Effects of ſuch Forbearance. Now they are Two: *The Glory of God, and the Benefit of the Church.*

The Former is recommended to us in thoſe Paſſages, *That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt,* Ver. 6. And again, *Wherefore receive ye one another, as Chriſt alſo received Us, to the Glory of God.* Ver. 7. The Glory of God is ſo exquiſite in itſelf, and ſo eſſential to Him, that it is not in the Power of any Creature, ſtrictly ſpeaking, to add to, or take away from it. All therefore, which the Scripture intends by thoſe Expreſſions *of glorifying or doing things to the Glory of God,* is only ſetting forth the Excellence of that Glory which, in Reality, is Infinite, and always the ſame. And this is done, when Matters are ſo order'd, as both to teſtify in our own Minds, and to beget in other People a due Reverence and Admiration of the Divine Majeſty and Perfections. When we win Men over to, and make them in Love with, Religion; the Belief of thoſe Truths which God hath revealed, and the Practice of thoſe Good Works, by which

he delights to be ſerved. And, in regard the Chriſtian Inſtitution is that reaſonable, that only acceptable, Service at preſent required from Us; hence, probably, that Title is added here, *The Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.* This being a Stile purely Evangelical; and intimating, that we do then moſt effectually contribute to God's Glory, when we promote the Growth and general Eſteem, and convince the World of the Power, and the mighty Advantages of the Chriſtian Religion.

Now, how greatly Concord and Charity, Compaſſion and mutual Forbearance, Unity in Opinion and Worſhip, and Conſent in Action, where theſe can be had; and where they cannot, Condeſcenſion, and Patience, and Peace, denying ourſelves, and pleaſing and ſeeking the Good of our Brethren: How much theſe Qualities, I ſay, make for the Credit of any Profeſſion, and the engaging others to come into it, is too manifeſt to need a Proof. They are Effects ſo ſenſible, ſo perfectly agreeable to the Temper and Deſires of every good Man; ſo ſuited to the Happineſs and Eaſe of private Perſons and publick Societies, that all ſorts of Men preſently feel their kindly Influence and general Benefit. They muſt needs do ſo; For, ſince all the Miſery and Miſchief, and Diviſion in the World, proceed from Partiality, and a corrupt Principle of *Self-ſeeking*; It follows, that no Doctrine can ſo effectually recommend itſelf to the Affections of conſidering Perſons, as, by giving Demonſtration of its Efficacy, in plucking up this Root of Bitterneſs, and diſpoſing Men to a meek and quiet Spirit, to Humility and Patience, to all equitable Allowances, and a generous Zeal for the Good of others, even at the Expence of ſome Trouble to themſelves. And herein is the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God truly admirable, that he hath made our Duty and our Happinoſs, his own Glory and the Good of Mankind ſo inſeparable, that the ſame Methods tend to promote Both. Theſe two, to ſpeak the Truth, are in effect but one and the ſame thing expreſſed by different Names, and conſider'd under

different Reſpects. So natural and juſt is the Apoſtle's Reaſoning here, which proceeds, in the next place, to urge theſe Virtues upon the *Romans*, from that other Topick intimated in his Prayer, which concludes the Epiſtle for the Day. And that is,

2. *The Benefit of the Church.* Of which we have Two Inſtances mention'd, *Being fill'd with all Joy and Peace in believing; and abounding in hope through the Power of the Holy Ghoſt.* Ver. 13. As to the Former, we may obſerve God invoked before, as *The God of Patience and Conſolation.* Not merely, I ſuppoſe, by reaſon of the things being mention'd juſt before, but to accommodate the Title to the Subject-matter of the Requeſt introduced by it. And here again the Apoſtle invokes the *God of Hope*, to fill his Servants with *Joy, and Peace, and Hope.* By joining all which together, he hints to us this moſt certain Truth, that where Patience and Peace are, there will not fail to be Comfort and Joy: And that, as theſe produce each other, ſo they cannot ſubſiſt, or be reaſonably hoped for, without each other. *Behold,* ſays David, *how good and joyful a thing it is for Brethren to dwell together in Unity.* Profitable and Good, as the *Dew* upon the Hills, that waters and refreſhes and crowns them with Plenty. Pleaſant and *joyful*, as precious *Ointment*, whoſe Odours cheer the Senſes, and perfume the Air with their Fragrancy. And thus it is, as in other Matters, ſo in none more, than in thoſe of Religion. When Men glorify God with one Mind and one Mouth, and keep Communion, notwithſtanding ſome Difference of Judgment; their Devotions are like a melodious Conſort, raviſhing Sweet; where every Voice, and every Inſtrument is tuned to the ſame Key; And, though the Parts are different, yet all ſtrike into one perfect Harmony. But the Diſagreement of Opinions, ſeconded by that of Affection, is like a jarring Inſtrument, or Voice out of Tune; which breaks the Concord quite, grates the Ear with

Compare Ver. 5. and 13.

Pſal. cxxxiii. Ver. 2, 3.

with its Harſhneſs, and diſturbs the whole Compoſition. This Inconvenience the pious Wiſdom of the Church ſo far provides againſt, as to put the ſame Forms of Publick Prayer into the Mouths of all her Children. (Such Forms *Grotius* here ſeems to think this Paſſage might allude to.) But if we do not pray and praiſe God *with one Mind*, as well as *one Mouth*; much of the Grace of the Cheerfulneſs, nay, and of the Force too is loſt, which ſuch Devotions would have, by being entirely united, and of a Piece throughout. And ſo it is in other Caſes. There muſt be *Peace in believing*, or there can be no true *Joy*. There muſt be *Patience* and Allowances for Ignorance and Infirmities, in Matters of leſs Moment; Charitable Conſtructions of their Behaviour, who differ from us in their Notions of Things, equivalent to the *Meats* and *Days* among theſe *Roman* Converts, or there can be no *Peace*. In the Subſtantial Parts of Religion theſe *Romans* were perfectly agreed: And it was not their differing in the Circumſtances, but their deſpiſing and condemning one another for ſuch Difference that made the Breach upon true Chriſtian Unity. Now, nothing of indifferent Temper can be of equal Importance with Charity. On the Former, the Beauty and Decency of Religion may depend in ſome meaſure; But in the Latter its very Life and Being properly conſiſts. It is not needful, perhaps not poſſible, that all Chriſtians ſhould agree in every point: but in the main Subſtance of Religion they may, and muſt; for this only is *Peace in Believing*. And They, who are thus far of a Mind, muſt not break Communion upon every ſlight Pretence; Not for things of Importance ſo ſmall, that the Diſturbance of the Church's Peace cannot be compenſated, by ſticking pertinaciouſly to, or holding obſtinately out againſt them. And, when Men have brought themſelves to a due Temper in theſe Matters, all is ſafe and well; they may have both *Peace* and *Joy*. Nay, which is more, they may *abound in Hope through the Power of the Holy Ghoſt:* The laſt good Effect

Effect mention'd here, and that, wherein the Benefit of the Church is greatly concern'd.

For *Hope*, in this Place, will bear a very large Interpretation. *Hope*, that the Perſons, thus Charitable to their Weaker Brethren, will not fail of a Reward, proportionable to that of Chriſt, and other Holy Patterns, whoſe Condeſcenſions they are thus careful to Copy after. *Hope*, that the *Weak* may be gain'd by ſuch Forbearance and Tenderneſs in the *Strong*, whom Rigour, and Stiffneſs, and Contempt, are but like to exaſperate, and harden the more in their Errors. *Hope*, that the ſubſtantial Parts may be better eſtabliſh'd, and all Believers improve in Faith and a good Life; when all lend their helping Hand to Truth and Virtue, without ſuffering their different Apprehenſions, what may be fitteſt for the *Ornament*, to divide their Endeavours for the *Strength* and *Security* of this *Spiritual Houſe*. *Hope*, that this Building may be ſtill enlarged, and take in thoſe, who as yet are Strangers and Enemies to Chriſt; when they obſerve how powerful ſuch Religion is, to beat down Pride and Envy, and every narrow ſelfiſh Paſſion, and to inſpire Men with a Godly Zeal, of not *pleaſing themſelves, but their Neighbours for their good to Edification*. *Hope*, *Laſtly*, That they who Ver. 2. maintain this Concord upon Earth, ſhall not fail to be join'd hereafter in that perfect Love, that unanimous giving Glory to God, which is the conſtant Employment, the unſpeakable Bliſs of Bleſſed Spirits in Heaven. A Bliſs, of which this Unity in the preſent Life, is not only an Emblem, but a Preparatory and indiſpenſable Condition. And this *Hope* is by the Apoſtle aſcribed to the *Power of the Holy Ghoſt*, and begged of God as his peculiar Gift; becauſe the Croſſes and Temptations, the Provocations and Cenſures, the Injuries and Sufferings, the Delay of God's moſt precious Promiſes, the Difficulties we meet with in doing our Duty, the froward Diſpoſitions and different Spirits of thoſe we converſe with, are an Over-Match for corrupt Nature.

Nature. A Nature which cannot bear its own Burden, much leſs that of other People, without the Aſſiſtance of a Supernatural and Divine Power.

III. I ſhall now, in the *Laſt* Place, cloſe this Diſcourſe with ſome practical Inferences, which may bring St. *Paul*'s Argument nearer Home, and render it of uſe to Us, and to all Chriſtians in general. As,

Firſt, The Ends, for which St. *Paul* ſays the Scriptures were deſign'd, are an excellent Direction, how to judge of our Improvement by Reading and Hearing the Word of God. It were heartily to be wiſh'd, that the groſs Neglect of converſing with theſe Sacred Oracles were not ſo ſcandalous, ſo Ungrateful, as muſt needs one Day riſe up in Judgment againſt the generality of Chriſtians, and condemn them. But it is greatly to be fear'd withal, that Matters will not be found much better, with many who do read, and attend to, and ſpend much of their Time and Pains upon, the Scriptures, yet all this very wrong, and to little or no true Effect. Entering into the Niceties of Argument and Expreſſion, ſettling dark Points of Hiſtory, explaining difficult Texts, and reconciling ſeeming Contradictions; Theſe are too often propounded, as the chief End of ſuch Studies. And theſe, it muſt be granted, have their Degree, not only of Uſefulneſs, but even of Neceſſity. Without ſuch Labours, we cannot make a full Diſcovery of the Treaſures hidden there. But even the moſt perfect Diſcovery does not anſwer the End of imparting thoſe Treaſures. For the ſubtileſt Critic ſtops ſhort, if he content himſelf with that Excellence, and do not proceed to the making a good Chriſtian. Would a Man demonſtrate that he hath profited by the Scriptures? St. *Paul* tells him, the Proofs to be produced for it are *Patience*, and *Comfort*, and *Hope*. Hath he learnt Meekneſs and Moderation to them who differ from him? Does he ſee the Ignorance and Infirmities of *Weaker* Chriſtians with Temper and Compaſſion? and, inſtead of cenſuring and deſpiſing, labour to inform them better,

ter, and gain upon their Affections, by Methods of Gentleneſs, and all becoming Condeſcenſions? Can he bear the Reproaches of them who are in the wrong, when he knows himſelf in the right? Can he put up Injuries for God's Sake, and quietly ſubmit to Affliction, when Providence lays it upon him? Does he ſupport himſelf in Hardſhips and Temptations, under Calumny and cauſeleſs Contradiction, by the Example of a ſuffering Saviour, and thoſe other bright Patterns of Meekneſs and Perſeverance, whoſe Trials and Praiſes are recorded in thoſe Books? Does he labour diligently for Peace and Order, Charity and Godly Unity? This, if he does, he is inſtructed, and mighty in the Scriptures, indeed. But till the Virtues commemorated and commanded there, are copied out into his Diſpoſition and Practice, *Though he underſtand all Myſteries and all Knowledge*, yet this Apoſtle tells him roundly, that all this while, he is *nothing* and *knows nothing, as he ought to know.* 1 Cor. xiii. 2. viii. 2.

2. *Secondly.* When the *Glory of God, and the Benefit of Chriſtians in Common*, are mention'd, as the Ends and Excellent Effects of Unity; This ſhews us the Errors of thoſe Men who foment Diviſions, and kindle Party-Quarrels, upon Pretence of God's Honour, and the Advantage of Religion. Even Peace, it is true, may be purchaſed too dear; and therefore, we muſt be ſure, that it be *Peace in Believing*. But when the Fundamentals of Religion are well ſecured, Then to be over-tenacious in Matters of leſs Moment, is not to ſerve the Cauſe of God and Truth, but our own Paſſions, and Prejudices, and Private Intereſts. The Spiritual *Jeruſalem* is never ſo ſtrong, as when the Builders contrive to make it *a City at Unity within itſelf*. And we can never *pleaſe ourſelves* too little, nor our leſs judicious *Neighbours* too much, provided we make the Apoſtle's Rule the End and Meaſure of our Condeſcenſions: Which is, to ſtick at nothing that may be for their *Good to Edification*. But, for preventing Ver. 2.

ing any Miſconſtruction, which, either Unwary or Deſigning Men may put upon this Inference, I muſt earneſtly intreat my Reader to conſider,

3. *Thirdly*, That the Matter in Diſpute between theſe *Jew* and *Gentile* Converts was perfectly indifferent. My Meaning is, that it was ſo, not only in its own Nature, as not eſſential to Religion; but it was ſo in Point of Uſe and Practice; by Reaſon no Authority had interpoſed ſo as poſitively to command or forbid the doing it. And therefore all required in this Caſe was, that every Man ſhould be ſatisfied in his own Conduct, and not cenſure or deſpiſe Them, who thought and acted otherwiſe. Both ſorts are ſuppoſed ſincere in their way, and both accepted by God for that Sincerity: Therefore neither of them obnoxious to the Contempt or Condemnation of Men. This was the State of their Caſe at that time. But what Advantage can fairly be drawn from hence, for holding out againſt the Commands of our Superiors in Matters of like Temper now, or to the Prejudice of that wholeſome Diſcipline, which, for the ſake of Order and Edification, preſcribes or limits the Uſe of Things in themſelves Indifferent, is not eaſy to comprehend. When Human Power is exerciſed in theſe, it acts in its proper Sphere. Theſe are indeed its ſtrict and only Province. That which is good in its own Nature is already enjoined to its Hand, and all that our Governors can do, is only to confirm and give it a Freſh Sanction. That which is evil in itſelf no Human Power can oblige Men to. And, if *Indifferent* Things be thus reſtrained, as to the Uſe of them; Be it in what Caſe it will, they are not thereby changed, as to their Nature. The Relation they bear to Religion does not make them ceaſe to be ſuch. For then they could not be impoſed, or removed, at the Pleaſure of our Governors. And conſequently, remaining ſtill *Indifferent*, they cannot ceaſe to be a proper Subject, for Human Prudence and Authority to exerciſe itſelf

Chap. xiv. 3, 4, 5, 6.

itſelf in. But tho' the Things themſelves are ſtill *Indifferent*; Yet Peace and Charity, Unity and Obedience, are not, cannot be ſo. So wide a Diſtance is there between a Caſe, where there was no antecedent Command, but every Man was left at large to govern himſelf by his own Judgment: And One, wherein Publick Authority hath given Rule to the Practice of Private Perſons, and determin'd the Uſe of that, which is judged moſt conducive to the Edification of the whole Community under its Care.

4. *Fourthly*, It follows, from this Diſcourſe of the Apoſtle, that there may be a true Chriſtian Unity preſerved among thoſe, who are far from being agreed in every Particular relating to Religion. *Both he that did, and He that did not eat, did it unto the Lord.* That is, Each of them went upon a Principle of Conſcience. The *Jewiſh* Party were certainly in the wrong: But their Error was tolerable. The only thing that made it otherwiſe, was their Uncharitableneſs attending that Error. And hence it is, that the Method taken by St. *Paul* for bringing theſe Parties to a good Underſtanding, is not to argue them all into one Opinion; but, waving the Merits of the Point in Controverſy, to forbid Uncharitableneſs to thoſe of the contrary Opinion. And the Reaſon why no more than this was neceſſary, is contained in theſe Words, *The Kingdom of God is not Meat and Drink, but Righteouſneſs, and Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghoſt. For he that in theſe Things ſerveth Chriſt, is acceptable to God, and approved of Men.* Theſe were not of the Subſtance of Religion; and therefore Chriſtian Communion might, and ought to be kept up, notwithſtanding any Differences, where the Foundations are not ſtruck at. Theſe Men were free, nay, they would do well to perſuade and gain upon one another, by calm and fair arguing, by all gentle and amicable Methods: But none of them was allowed to cenſure and to condemn thoſe, who underſtood leſs than

Chap. xiv. 6.

Chap. xiv. 17, 18.

than Themſelves. And this was ſufficient to preſerve Unity of Affection, as that again is ſufficient for the Purpoſes of God's Glory, and the Common Good; and as much, as the State of the Church, in the preſent World, ſtands in need of.

5. *Laſtly*, We ſhall do well very diligently to obſerve the Means preſcribed here, for bringing us all to this Temper. And they are ſuch as follow. Reflecting with all due Humility, upon the infinitely greater Condeſcenſions of God and Chriſt towards ourſelves: Who are the very Beſt of us infinitely more unworthy Their Compaſſion, than the Weakeſt or Worſt of our Brethren can poſſibly be of ours. Attending impartially, and indeed eſpecially, to the good and commendable Qualities of Them that differ from us, and not only to their Errors and their Faults. For as it will ill become Them to ſhew Rigour in leſs Matters, whoſe only Hope is owing to Mercy in Greater; ſo the general Cauſe of Cenſure and Contempt, is the over-rating our own Qualifications and Advantages, and over-looking thoſe of our Brethren: Seeing nothing in ourſelves, or thoſe of our own Side, but what magnifies them in our Eſteem; and nothing in thoſe of a different Judgment, but what repreſents them little and deſpicable in our Eyes. Bigotry, and Pride, and Self-love, are the curſed Fomenters of Uncharitableneſs and Faction; as Humility, Candor, and Meekneſs, Largeneſs of Heart, and a Zeal for the Good of Chriſtians in general, are the ſure Eſtabliſhers of Temper, and Peace, and Love. With theſe therefore if we throughly poſſeſs our Souls, *The God of Hope will fill us all with Joy and Peace in believing, and we ſhall abound in Hope through the Power of the Holy Ghoſt.*

Ver. 3, 6, 7.
Ver. 8, 9.

The

The GOSPEL.

See Matt. xxiv. 29, &c.

St. Luke xxi. 25.

PARAPHRASE.

25. *AND there ſhall be Signs in the Sun, and in the Moon, and in the Stars, and upon the Earth Diſtreſs of Nations with perplexity, the Sea and the Waves roaring.*

25. When Chriſt ſhall come to execute Judgment, there ſhall be many dreadful Signs of his Approach, prodigious Darkneſs and frightful Signs in the Heavens, Calamities and Confuſion over all the Earth, horrible Tempeſts at Sea.

26. *Mens Hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after thoſe things which are coming on the Earth: For the Powers of Heaven ſhall be ſhaken.*

26. Dread and Deſpair of wicked Men, whoſe guilty Hearts ſhall then miſgive them, when they ſee theſe Terrors take hold of, and their Convulſions reach, even Heaven itſelf.

27. *And then ſhall they ſee the Son of Man coming in a Cloud, with Power and great Glory.*

27. And then ſhall they behold the Son of Man appear as a viſible Judge, attended with a vaſt Retinue of Angels, and all the Demonſtrations of Omnipotence and Majeſty Divine.

28. *And when theſe things begin to come to paſs, then look up and lift up your Heads, for your Redemption draweth nigh.*

28. But let not the Righteous be daunted at this general Conſternation; for to ſuch it ſhall be a Day of Joy, of ſpeedy and complete Deliverance from all their Miſery and Trouble.

29. *And he ſpake to them a Parable, Behold the Fig-tree, and all the Trees.*

30. *When they now ſhoot forth, ye ſee and know of your own ſelves, that Summer is now nigh at hand.*

29. And be aſſured that what I foretel is moſt true.

31. *So likewiſe ye, when ye ſee theſe things come to paſs, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.*

31. For the ſhooting of Leaves and Buds is not a ſurer Token of the warm Weather drawing on, than theſe Signs are, that Chriſt will then quickly enter upon his glorious Kingdom.

32. Many Perſons now alive ſhall ſee ſo much of theſe Propheſies accompliſh'd, as concerns the Deſtruction of the *Jewiſh* Polity: And the reſt, which regards the Univerſal Judgment, is no leſs ſure.

32. *Verily I ſay unto you, this Generation ſhall not paſs away till all be fulfilled.*

33. For, though Heaven and Earth are looked upon as the moſt fixed and immutable Things; yet are not even Theſe ſo firm, as my Predictions of theſe Things. They ſhall then be changed and diſſolved, but my Word ſhall not be changed, nor ſhall one Tittle I have now delivered, fail of its deſigned Event.

33. *Heaven and Earth ſhall paſs away, but my Words ſhall not paſs away.*

COMMENT.

IN this Scripture we have the Three following Particulars remarkable,

Verſe 25, 26. I. *The terrible Forerunners of the laſt Judgment, and how fit theſe Prognoſticks are to warn us of its Approach.*

Verſe 27. II. *The viſible and Majeſtick Appearance of our Judge.*

Verſes 26, 28. III. *The different Reſentments, with which Men ſhall entertain the Notice of his Coming, according to their different Circumſtances and Expectations.*

I. I begin with *the terrible Forerunners of this Judgment, and the Fitneſs of ſuch Prognoſticks to give us Warning of our Lord's Approach.* Of theſe we have a full and very dreadful Account, in the Writings both of the Prophets in the *Old*, and of the Apoſtles and Evangeliſts in the *New Teſtament.* And by conſulting the Marginal * References, the Reader may quickly ſatisfy himſelf, that no Circumſtance of Horror ſhall then be wanting, which may render this Solemnity Awful and

* *See* Iſai. xxiv. xxx, xxxiv. Dan. vii.

and Great; That no Part of the Creation shall be exempted from contributing to its terrible Pomp; But all nature will feel the mighty Shock, and labour under an universal Convulsion. Above us, Fire and Vapours, and Pillars of Smoak, Thunderings and Lightnings, Gloominess and thick Darkness, Prodigies and fearful Sights; The Light of the Sun put out, the Moon turn'd into Blood, the Stars starting from their Orbs, and the Heavens shrivell'd up, like a flaming Scrowl. Upon Earth, unnatural Treachery, shameless Vice, and all manner of Wickedness: Wars and Commotions, Famines and Pestilences, Storms and Earthquakes. The Dreadfulness whereof, we are told, was but very feebly represented, by all those astonishing Manifestations of God's Presence in Mount *Sinai*, which even *Moses* was not able to sustain, without exceeding Fear and Trembling. And, if the Terrors, thought necessary to beget a just Reverence for God's Law at its Promulgation, were so insupportable; What, can we think, will the Day of Wrath and Vengeance implacable be, when the bold Contemners of his Law are to be made Examples to all Eternity? And, since Fear is a Passion, to which even disingenuous Tempers lie open, when gentler Motives can take no hold of them, the last of all Impressions that stubborn Sinners harden themselves against; it was very proper for our Blessed Lord to give such Descriptions of his Coming to Judgment, that They, who will not be *constrained* by the Greatness of his *Love*, may at least be *persuaded* by the Knowledge of his Terrors. In short, that all of us may live like Men, who have fair Warning, what hangs over their Heads, and what will one Day be most certainly executed, upon all Them, whom this Notice does not affright into better Manners.

Joel ii. Zeph. i. Hagg. ii. Malachi iv. Matth. xxiv. Mark xiii. Heb. xii. Revel. xx.

Heb. xii. 21.

2 Cor. v. 14. 11.

But this is not all I mean, by the Fitness of these Terrors, to rouze Men into Thought, and put them upon

conſidering whom they have to deal with. My Intention is to ſhew, that theſe Signs foregoing are demonſtrative Evidences of a general Judgment to follow; and, upon that Account, excellently qualified, to awaken in our Minds an Expectation of the thing, which they undeniably prove. For, What are all thoſe Plagues, and Prodigies, and outrageous Wickedneſſes, mentioned in the Scriptures here referred to, but ſo many Inſtruments of angry Juſtice, which God takes into his Hand, as he ſees Occaſion, for chaſtiſing the Diſobedient, or cutting of the Incorrigible? In ſome of theſe he ſtrikes immediately by himſelf: In Others he arms Natural Cauſes againſt them: and in a third ſort he contrives it ſo, that the Sins of one Man ſhall ſcourge thoſe of another. But ſtill by all theſe ways he executes Vengeance. And therefore the Inference common to them all, is, that God does obſerve, and think himſelf concern'd to puniſh, wicked Actions, in ſome way, and at ſome time, or other. Now nothing can be more apparent, than that theſe Puniſhments do not make an exact Diſtinction between Good and Evil Men, in the preſent State of Things; And therefore the Character of a Righteous and Holy Judge requires, that there ſhould be a ſtricter Reckoning behind; for bringing thoſe to Juſtice who eſcape here, and making thoſe good Men amends hereafter, who endure Miſery and Wrong here; notwithſtanding they be at preſent involved in publick Calamities, together with the guilty Wretches, whoſe Sins had provoked them. Were no wicked Men puniſh'd, no good Men afflicted or oppreſſed; Or did Every Man receive now in hand, in full Tale and exact Proportion to his Deſerts; we could not then indeed urge the ſame neceſſity of another Judgment in reſerve. But as it is the ſame Juſtice, which diſpoſes God to puniſh Some, muſt needs diſpoſe him to puniſh All, that continue Refractory; that ſo he may, by ſettling the preſent Inequality of his Diſtributions right, reveal to the whole

Chryſ. Tom. 5. Serm. 51. pag. 345. Ed. Eton.

whole World the Righteouſneſs of his Providence. While God acts in the Quality of a Governor, (as in the preſent State of Affairs he does it,) it may ſuffice, that Virtue be encouraged, and Vice diſcountenanc'd, in general: But, ſince his Attributes require, he ſhould act as a Judge too; they muſt imply Juſtice to every Cauſe that ſhall come in Iſſue before him, and a due Recompence nicely awarded, according to the Behaviour of each Man in particular. If all ſhall be judged, all ſhall have Right done them. And therefore this, which is now done but in Part, ſhall be done one Day in its utmoſt Perfection. And its being done in part to Some, in the Sufferings of this world, is an Evidence that God will find a time for doing right in full to All, in the next World. For *the Judge of all the Earth* could not anſwer that Character, if ſo much as one ſingle Inhabitant in it did not, at one time or other, *receive the things done in his Body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.* 2 Cor. v. 10.

II. The *Second* Obſervation is, *the Viſible and Majeſtick Appearance of this Judge. Then ſhall they ſee the Son of Man coming in a Cloud with Power and great Glory.* Ver. 27. I need not ſpend time in proving, that this *Son of Man* is no other, than our Bleſſed Saviour. In this the Scriptures are moſt expreſs, that the* very *Jeſus of Nazareth, whom the Jews ſlew and hanged on a Tree, is ordained of God to be the Judge of Quick and Dead.* * Acts x. 36, 39, 41, 42. And the reſult of this Argument is, That Chriſt ſhall execute Judgment in his *Human Nature*, and manifeſt himſelf to the Senſes of the Parties concerned. That very Body, which was born and died, was buried and roſe again the Third Day, which aſcended into Heaven, and is now ſeated at the Right Hand of God, ſhall locally deſcend, and ſit upon a Throne; and, as his Divine Nature renders him an All-wiſe and Almighty, ſo ſhall

his Appearance in our Human Form render him, at that Day, an Audible and a Visible Judge.

But, though he shall then appear in the same Nature, yet he shall not appear in the same Manner as he did in the Days of his Flesh upon Earth. That Body formerly was exposed to Poverty and Weakness, to Reproach and Contempt, to Suffering and Pain, to Agonies and Death. These, like a thick Cloud, did eclipse and intercept the Divine Excellencies, which even then * *dwelt in him fully and bodily*. But, at his last Coming, that Veil shall be quite done away, and he will break forth in all the Lustre of an Incarnate God. His Body, like a Fountain of pure Light, out-shining the Sun in its Strength; the putting out of which, and the rest of the heavenly Luminaries, † Some have understood, only of the transcendent Beauty of our Lord's Glorified Body, in Comparison whereof their Brightest Rays will be as Night and gross Darkness. Such a glorious Change shall there be then, in the Person of our, once humbled and despised Jesus; So noble a Recompence shall his crucified Body receive, for all the Pain and Shame of the Cross; so excellently resplendent, so all-divine his Presence, infinitely above what any Resemblances, taken from Created Beings, can give us any tolerable Idea of, above what even inspired Writers could express, above what the largest finite Mind can stretch itself to conceive.

* Colos. ii. 9.

† Chrys. Theoph.

The Splendor of this Coming will be yet more increased, by the Manner and Circumstances of it. By Christ's being seated upon a Cloud. Which we have Reason to understand in the plain and literal Sense; ‡ Whether we reflect upon the Manner of God's usual Manifestation of his Presence in the *Old Testament*, Or our Lord's Transfiguration in the *New*; Or especially upon * the Testimony of those Angels, that attended at his Ascension. For, while the Apostles then present were *looking stedfastly toward Heaven, as he*

‡ Exod. xvi. 10. xix. 9. xxxiv. 5. Lev. xvi. 2. Numb. xv. 25. 1 Kings viii. 10. Isai. vi. 1.

2 Pet. i. 17.

* Acts i. 9, 10.

he went up, behold Two Men ſtood by them in white Apparel; Which alſo ſaid, ye Men of Galilee, why ſtand ye gazing up into Heaven? This ſame Jeſus, which is taken up from you into Heaven, ſhall ſo come in like manner, as ye have ſeen him go into Heaven. All which compared with our Lord's own Declarations † concerning his Second Coming, with what St. *Paul* ‡ foretels, and * St. *John* foreſaw, are abundantly ſufficient, to juſtify the generally received Opinion, that, as our Bleſſed Saviour went up into Heaven, ſo he ſhall return from thence to Judgment upon a true and material Cloud.

† Mark xiii. 26, xiv. 69.
‡ 1 Theſ. iv. 17.
* Rev. xiv. 14, 15, 16.

By the Power mentioned here, Some have underſtood † thoſe Heavenly Hoſts, which, we are aſſur'd, ſhall then attend this Judge. But, beſides this Military Senſe of the ‡ Word, I ſee no Reaſon, why we ſhould not extend it to all thoſe Demonſtrations of Majeſty and Omnipotence, in which the Lord Chriſt ſhall then exert himſelf, Such as opening the Graves, aſſembling all Nations and Ages of Men, and compelling the moſt mighty, the moſt unwilling, to obey the unwelcome Summons. Doing himſelf Honour upon his Enemies, Reſcuing and Rewarding his once deſpiſed and afflicted Servants, Unlocking the Myſteries of Providence, Exerciſing a Dominion uncontroulable, and diſplaying all the Attributes of the Godhead in exquiſite Perfection. This ſhall be the Power, This the Glory of that Great Day. And all this will be done, in a Manner ſenſible and conſpicuous to the whole World, that ungodly Wretches may look on Him, whom they have pierced with the blaſphemous Impieties, and feel the Terrors, which they diſdained to fear: That the Righteous may ſee and know whom they have truſted, and gaze with Joy and Tranſport inexpreſſible, on the Adorable Excellencies of Him, whom their Soul loved, even when diſtant and unſeen. But I ought to remember, that

† Matth. xvi. 27. xxiv. 31. xxv. 31. 1 Theſ. iv. 16. 2 Theſ. i. 7, 8. Matth. xiii. 41, 42.
‡ δυναμις.

theſe are Reflections, which more properly belong to my *Third* Head.

III. The different Reſentments, with which the Approach of this Judgment will be entertain'd, according to Mens different Circumſtances and Expectations from it. This is collected from the 26th and 28th Verſes, each of which deſerves our particular Notice.

St. *Luke* hath related our Lord's Prediction thus, that, *there ſhall then be great Perplexity*; *that Mens Hearts ſhall fail them for Fear*, *and for looking after thoſe things which are coming on the Earth.* St. *Matthew*, that *then all the Tribes of the Earth ſhall mourn*; and St. *John* is yet a little more particular, *Behold, he cometh in the Clouds, and every Eye ſhall ſee him, and they alſo which pierced him: And all Kindreds of the Earth ſhall wail becauſe of him.* From which laſt Paſſage, and from the Command here to Some, that They ſhould look up, and eſteem thoſe Warnings of our Lord's laſt Coming, a Matter of Joy and Happineſs to them, We are ſufficiently warranted to underſtand theſe Fears and Confuſions, as Paſſions, not common to All promiſcuouſly, but which belong and are peculiar to the Wicked; ſuch as have Reaſon to apprehend, that a Judgment will turn to their Diſadvantage. Whereas the Righteous, on the other hand, are encouraged to wiſh and long for it, as that which brings on and ſhall compleat their *Redemption.* And how juſt Ground there is for theſe ſo contrary Reſentments, a very few Words may ſuffice to illuſtrate.

Ver. 26, 28.
Matth. xxiv. 30.
Rev. i. 7.
Verſe 28.

1. For, *Firſt*, Where ſhall we find Terms, to expreſs the Tumults and Terrors of thoſe guilty Breaſts, whom this Day *overtakes*, (as we are told it ſhall do very many) *unawares?* Not *unawares* for Want of ſufficient Warning; Much might be then alledged in their Excuſe: But *unawares*, for want of neceſſary

Verſe 34.

neceſſary Preparation, and attending to that Warning; which leaves no room for Apologies. Where ſhall the refractory *Jews*, Where the profeſs'd Infidels, Where the Enemies and Perſecutors of Chriſt and his Members then appear? Where the treacherous Apoſtle that betray'd and ſold him; the Prieſts and Rulers, that ſet him at nought; the corrupt Judge, who againſt his own Conſcience, condemn'd him; the malicious Rabble, that preferred a Robber and Murderer before this Prince of Life and Glory; the hardened Wretches who inſulted over his dying Agonies; the bribed Soldiers, and ſuborning Scribes, who by falſe Reports endeavour'd to ſtifle and deſtroy the Credit of that Reſurrection, which was the certain Pledge of this final Judgment? What Shame and Confuſion ſhall cover theſe Faces, when his Croſs, that *Sign of the Son of Man*, heretofore a Mark of Ignominy and Pain, ſhall be ſet up as a Banner, and they, who fought manfully under this Standard, ſhall then be found the only happy Conquerors; With what Amazement will the Scoffers at Chriſt and his Goſpel behold this once Mock-King and Univerſal Monarch, and the Thorns, with which he was crown'd in Malice and barbarous Sport, converted into Rays of Light and Glory: Attended *with thouſand thouſands, and ten thouſand times ten thouſand Guards of Angels ſtanding before him*; Dan. vii. 10. each of which ſingle hath hitherto been always too dazling bright for mortal Eyes to ſuſtain; But, why do I ſpeak of theſe Men? Let us come nearer home. What Thoughts will then ſtart up, and force themſelves upon thoſe obſtinate, thoſe diſſolute Sons of Pleaſure and Vanity, who now, in Defiance of their Baptiſmal Vows, and better Education, make ſuch a Jeſt of a crucified God, and laugh at the Threatenings of his judging the World, as a Fable cunningly deviſed to keep ſilly Souls in Awe: The Artifice of Politicians, the Talk of Church-men, contrived to enſlave eaſy credulous Creatures, that know no better, and to check the Sallies of brave

brave and daring Wickedneſs? Alas! theſe Men ſhall find to their infinite Coſt and Miſery, that their Preachers have not talked all this for their Trade, but ſpoke the Words of Truth and Soberneſs; And, if in any Thing they ſwerved from Truth, it hath been only in drawing theſe Horrors leſs than the Life, and not being capable of repreſenting the Sinner's Danger, in its juſt Proportions and blackeſt Colours. What a diſmal Change ſhall then ſucceed, when the inſolent Mockers of God and his wiſe Diſpenſation, the Mimickry of profane Wit, and vile Burleſques of Scripture, that filthy nauſeous Froth, which is now thought to give ſuch Reliſh to Converſation, ſhall ſink into fruitleſs Confeſſions of Truth found too late; When every blaſphemous Tongue ſhall be ſtruck dumb with Guilt and Deſpair; and in the Place of loud Laughter at the moſt ſacred Things, expoſed by inſolent Buffoonery, ſhall ſucceed Weeping and Wailing, Trembling Knees, Wringing Hands, and Gnaſhing Teeth, thenceforth and for ever.

What Hills ſhall the profane Swearers call to fall upon them? What Mountains to cover them, when He, whoſe Blood and Wounds have been ſo wantonly toſs'd upon their Tongues, ſhall come in flaming Fire to revenge theſe rude Affronts of his moſt Holy Name and Sufferings? Yes, impious Wretches, yes; The Plagues of God ſhall confound you, and the Damnation you have ſo often and ſo loudly call'd for, will not always linger. Your Wiſhes are heard, Hell hath open'd her Mouth, and the Wrath of the Moſt High comes rolling on a-main; It ruſhes on you like a mighty Torrent, and ſinks you, without Mercy, into the Lake of Fire unquenchable; there to be ever tormented with that Devil and his Angels, to which your bitter Curſes have ſo often, in dreadful Formality, deliver'd up yourſelves. Nay, where ſhall even thoſe, (in Compariſon Modeſt) Sinners appear, who in Words are content to own that Lord, whom in Works they too palpably deny;

deny; and discredit at least a Religion which they do not professedly disclaim? The Intemperate and Lascivious; the greedy Worldlings, or the glittering great Ones that spend their Time and Wealth in Vice or Vanity; that give us the hearing when we recommend Treasures in Heaven and spiritual Joys, but have their Heart still fastened upon the Dross of Riches and sensual Delights? and what will these Things profit in the Day of Wrath? This Judge is not to be bribed with Money, nor awed with Pomp; They must then render a strict Account, not only how they got, but how they employed their Possessions; and be pierced through and through, with this stabbing Reflection, that the Talents squandered away in stately Buildings, costly Apparel, numerous Equipage, and worldly Grandeur, are now become the Instruments of their Ruin; Those very Talents, which, if expended in cloathing the naked, and feeding the hungry Members of Christ, might have open'd them a Passage into everlasting Habitations of Bliss and Glory. In vain will they then labour to divert the Thoughts of Judgment with Company and Diversion, or to drown them in Wine and Debauches; The Judge is at the Door, and will be seen, and heard, and felt, whether they will or no.

Think then, Sinner, think if thou darest, on this fatal Day; and know there is not upon Earth a Creature so despicably cowardly and poor-spirited as He whom Vice detains in wilful Ignorance, and bereaves of Courage to see and believe the Truth. And were not this better thought of, while thinking will do some good? Few Men are so desperately hardened and forsaken, as not to be powerfully awaken'd by the Bitterness of Affliction, the Languishings of Sickness, or the near Approach of Eternity, when a Death-bed sets them upon the Brink of it. But if God in his just Judgment suffer some to go out of the World, as insensible as they lived in it, yet even They shall find at the Time spoken of here, that God is in very good earnest, and will repay

Sinners

Sinners to their Face. And, if the Apprehenſions of this, even here, and at ſome Diſtance, are ſo inſupportable, as wounded Conſciences daily find and feel, tho' the Gate of Mercy be not yet ſhut; What Rage, what Remorſe, what Confuſion and Deſpair ſhall overwhelm thoſe loſt Wretches, who have out-ſtayed the Day of Grace, who have a Gaping Hell juſt before their Eyes, and no Proſpect left, but that of fiery Indignation, already gone out to devour the Ungodly? How infinitely frightful muſt theſe Things be when actually preſent, which even afar off chill all our Blood and Spirits, and are not to be borne? Frightful even now, above what even the moſt melancholy Fears can paint. But, when all Hope, all Remedy is paſt, Jeſus defend us! Who may then abide the ghaſtly Object! *O conſider this then*, conſider it and be wiſe, *ye that forget God*; for otherwiſe be aſſured the Time is coming, when he will *pluck you away, and there ſhall be none to deliver you.*

Pſal. l. 22.

2. But praiſed be the Divine Mercy for it, there is a bright Side of this Judgment too. For, as for the Righteous and Faithful, it is not ſo with them. Words are as much too weak, and the utmoſt Range of Imagination is far too ſhort for the Tranſports and Overflowing of theſe Mens Joy, as for the Anguiſh and Amazement of the Slothful and Wicked Servants. It is not indeed to be ſuppoſed, that the very beſt of Mortals can look ſtedfaſtly up to this Tribunal, and all its terrible Pomp, without any Manner of Miſgiving or Concern: For even the beſt deceive themſelves, if they ſay they have no Sin. And, where there are Sins to reproach one's ſelf withal, and great and numberleſs Frailties and Imperfections to lament, there we are not to wonder if there be ſome Thoughts of Heart, not perfectly compoſed. But, whatever thoſe may be, while the Eye is turned inward upon their own Breaſts; yet, when it looks up to Jeſus, that *Lamb ſlain to take away the Sins of the World*, the Cloud is preſently diſperſed

perſed by Faith in his Sacrifice. The Apprehenſions of a Judgment are tempered with Hope and Holy Truſt; and then no longer the Effect of Deſpondence and Doubt, but only of Humility and Godly Shame; when Sins have been repented of and forſaken, we ſee God, not as an implacable Avenger, but a reconciled and tender Father. We are ſure this Judge will not be *extreme to mark what hath been done amiſs*, by them who have undone it all again in ſecond Thoughts and ſerious Amendment. Such can behold the Glories and Triumphs of infinite Mercy in the Son of God, now bright and all divine, once condeſcending ſo low as to die for Their Sakes. They can depend upon all fair Allowances for Infirmities and Temptations, from One who hath felt the Weakneſs of Human Nature in his own Perſon, and did not diſdain himſelf to be tempted. They can ſupport themſelves with this Confidence, that He who *reconciled* them at the Expence of his own Blood, *while they were yet Enemies*; will not fail to ſave them by his *own Life* and Power, now they are made Friends. Had ſuch Men been allowed the Liberty of chuſing their own Judge, Prudence and Intereſt muſt have directed them to Him who had expreſs'd ſuch unexampled Kindneſs; One ſo infinitely Good in his own Nature, and ſo infinitely tender of and Good to Them. This therefore is Their Comfort, this their Security, that in his Wounds they have a ſure Refuge; That they are united as living Members to this Myſtical Head; That he accounts their Happineſs his own; That His * *Faithfulneſs* and *Truth* are inviolably engaged for their Pardon, and there can be no † *Condemnation to any who are* thus *in Chriſt Jeſus*. The Plagues and Fears which wound the Wicked mortally, fly over the good Man's Head, and not one of them touches him. This gives to ſuch Boldneſs to lift up their Heads, even in that dreadful Day, that their *Redemption* now *draws nigh*: The utmoſt and moſt deſirable Accompliſhment

Heb. ii. 4.
Rom. v. 10.

* 1 John i. 9.
† Rom. viii. 1.

pliſhment of that great Work ſo wonderfully begun, ſo wiſely carried on for God's Elect; the End of their Warfare, the Pardon of their Tranſgreſſions, the Recompence of all their Toils and Sufferings; the ſpeedy and entire Deliverance from Oppreſſion and Wrong, from Danger and Temptation, from Corruption and Mortality, and, which is beſt of all, from Frailty and Imperfection, and the very Poſſibility of ſinning any more. This is that Bliſsful Day in which their vile Bodies are to be *changed and faſhioned like unto Chriſt's Glorious Body:* Their Souls ſatisfied with, and likened to, the Divine Excellencies; their every Faculty enlarged; and They from henceforth ſeeing, admiring, praiſing, loving, living and reigning with their Lord for ever. Such is the Honour all his Servants have. Such is the Bounty of their gracious Maſter. So tranſcendently great the Reward for poor and mean, becauſe they have been faithful and ſincere, Labours; ſo bright, ſo maſſy their Crown, *for the light Afflictions of a Moment:* An Eternity of Happineſs in Heaven; Happineſs as exquiſite as Men are capable of receiving for a Moment of Sorrow and Labour upon Earth.

Phil. iii. 21.

2 Cor. iv. 17.

O Bleſſed Voice of the Archangel, that ſhall proclaim this general Jubilee! O Joyful Sound of the laſt Trump, that ſhall awaken the confuſed Heaps of Duſt, to Incorruption and Immortal Glory! O welcome Tidings to thoſe righteous Souls, who ſhall receive the Warnings of this Judgment, with that peaceful Song of the Prophet, *Behold your God! Behold your God* and Saviour *comes with a ſtrong Hand, his Arm ſhall rule for him; Behold his Reward is with him, and his Work before him!* O gracious Sentence to all that love and fear him, *Come ye bleſſed Children of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the World!* O happy Stewards, whoſe Talents well employed, ſhall then be thought worthy that Commendation, *Well done good and*

Iſa. lx. 9, 10.

Matt. xxv. 34.

and faithful Servants, because you have been faithful over a few Things, I will make you Rulers over many Things, enter ye into the Joy of your Lord! Grant, Blessed Lord, that these, and all thy holy Scriptures may be so read, heard, mark'd, learned, and inwardly digested by us, that by Patience and Comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the Blessed Hope of everlasting Life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Matt. xxv. 21.

Collect for the Day.

The Third Sunday in Advent.

The COLLECT.

O Lord Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy * Messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the †Ministers and Stewards of thy Mysteries, may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way by ‖ turning the Hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that, at thy second coming to judge the world, we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

* Luke i. 76. Mark i. 2. Matt. xi. 10, 14.
† 1 Cor. iv. 1.
‖ Luke i. 17.

The EPISTLE.

1 Cor. iv. 1.

1. *LET a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.*

PARAPHRASE.

1. Let Christians look upon their Teachers, not as Masters of their Faith or Men acting for themselves, and upon their own Heads, but as Servants employed by Christ, our common Master. But withal, let them consider, how honourable a Service this is, since Christ hath made Them his Stewards, the Dispensers of his Word, and other Means of Grace, to the rest of the Family.

2. *Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.*

2. Now every body knows, that the main Qualification for this Post, and that which recommends the Persons in it, is Fidelity in their Master's Business.

3. But

3. But of this Fidelity Men are not so competent Judges as to say, who best does his Duty, and who does it not so well; and so to prefer one before another, upon any external Advantages, which one may seem to have above another. And therefore the Judgment of Men is of no great weight with me; nay, I dare not rely upon my own Judgment so far, as to depreciate others, and prefer myself.

3. *But with me it is a very small thing, that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.*

4. For though I bless God, my Conscience reproach me not with any Neglect or Mismanagement in my Office; yet, I will not be bold to say, I am absolutely clear of any; Because God will make a stricter Enquiry into these Matters, and knows me better than I do myself.

4. *For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord.*

5. Let this Consideration therefore prevail with you to suspend such Censures of your Teachers, and do not anticipate the Judgment of God. For all judging of others in this manner is at present rash, and hasty, and unseasonable. You are yet in the Dark, and want that Evidence to proceed upon, which only He, who hath Right and Ability to judge the Persons intrusted by him, will one Day produce. For he will disclose many lurking Motives, that no mortal Eye could discover; He will make plain to all the World, not only what each Man did, but with what Intent and Disposition of Mind he did it. And this is the time for those, who have discharged their Stewardship fairly and honestly, to be rewarded by their own Master and proper Judge, the Just and All-seeing God.

5. *Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God.*

COMMENT.

THE Apostle, in the Chapters before, had reprov'd these *Corinthians*, for Divisions and Party-quarrels, sprung up among them, to the great Disturbance of the Church. These were chiefly fomented by some false Teachers, who labour'd to ingratiate themselves by affected Eloquence, subtle Reasonings, and other popular Arts; to the bringing the Simplicity

city of the Gospel, and those plain Methods of Teaching, used by St. *Paul* and his Assistants, into general Disesteem. This drew on many invidious Comparisons between their Preachers; insomuch that, not only They, who had been seduced into Error, but even the Orthodox Christians, too, began to distinguish themselves by their Adherence to this or that Person, under whose Ministry they had been baptized, or instructed in the Faith. In Opposition to such Carnal and Mischievous Distinctions, St. *Paul* puts them in Mind, that He, and his Fellow-Labourers in the Gospel, were not like the Philosophers of Old, Men ambitious of advancing new Doctrines, or instituting peculiar Sects called after their own Names; but subordinate Officers only, and such as made it their Business to unite all their Proselytes under One common Head and Master, *Christ Jesus*. The Design of them all was the same, and their Commission from one and the same Hand; though they who acted by it were different, and acted in different Capacities. The Character then which they were to be considered under, and the Esteem proportioned to it, must be such as belongs to Persons in Trust. So that no Disciple, gained over by their Labours, might be allowed to *glory in Men*; Since Men were only Instruments, chosen and used by the Wise Master-Builder, for carrying up his Spiritual House. The Edification whereof would be best promoted, by attributing to those Workmen, neither more nor less than their Due. Not giving that Respect to *Ministers*, which is His Right alone, whose *Ministers they are:* Nor treating those as Servants of the meanest Quality, who, though Servants, are yet of the first and most honourable Rank. *Stewards*, intrusted with a Charge no less important than the *Mysteries of God*; and as such accountable to their Great Lord. That the Thing they are properly

Chap. i. 22. iii. 4.

Chap. iii. 21, 22.

Chap. vi. 1.

Ver. 2.

accountable for, is not Skill and Addreſs, ſo much as Fidelity and Honeſty; And, as none but their Maſter hath Authority to reckon with them, ſo none but He can be a competent Judge, how they have acquitted themſelves in this Reſpect. The Reaſon is, becauſe many Things, the moſt material in an Enquiry of that Nature, are yet in the Dark; and like to continue ſo, till that Time come, (and come it will) when not only the Actions of each Man employed, but the true Principles and ſecret Views upon which he acted, ſhall be diſcloſed. This makes it reaſonable for every one thus intruſted, to be content with referring himſelf and his Proceedings, to the Juſtification and Reward which every faithful Servant ſhall then receive in the Face of the whole World; and not to be extremely ſolicitous, what Others (who ſee Things but imperfectly, who conſider and cenſure them partially, and who have nothing to do to cenſure theſe Matters at all) ſhall take upon them to ſay or think of his Integrity, in the mean while. This makes it neceſſary for Men to ſuſpend their Judgments, and not pronounce too haſtily, of Things and Perſons which they have neither Authority to judge, nor as yet ſufficient Matter in Evidence, to ground a Juſt and Peremptory Sentence upon.

Ver. 3, 4, 5.

This is plainly the Subſtance and Deſign of the Exhortation, recommended to our Thoughts in *this Day's Epiſtle*, which would furniſh me with ſeveral uſeful Heads of Diſcourſe. For inſtance,

1. *Firſt*, Hence Private Chriſtians may learn, in how honourable a Character thoſe Men ſerve, to whom the Care of their Souls is committed; and what a Defence this ought to be, againſt that vilifying Malice and Contempt, which Proud and Profligate People are ſo ready, upon all Occaſions, to let fly at Them, and their Office. For ſince every Employment of conſequence derives a Regard upon the Perſon ſet in it, in Proportion to the Dignity of his Maſter, and his Place, and the Uſefulneſs of it (when regularly diſcharged)

Ver. 10.

charged) to the Publick Good; *Miniſters of Chriſt* cannot be deſpiſed without an Affront to their Maſter; and *Stewards of the Myſteries of God* cannot be made a publick Jeſt and Scorn, without ſinking the Credit of Religion and the Goſpel. We know who hath ſaid, *He that deſpiſeth You, deſpiſeth Me; and he that deſpiſeth Me, deſpiſeth Him that ſent Me.* Luke x, 16. And, leſt this ſhould be thought a Saying confined to the immediate Apoſtles, and Diſciples of our Lord then upon Earth, he declares after his Reſurrection, that, *as his Father had ſent Him, ſo He ſends Them*, (*i. e.*) the Apoſtles and their Succeſſors upon the ſame Embaſſy and with the ſame full Powers. (All Powers he means, that were neceſſary for the Eſtabliſhment, the Inſtruction, the Diſcipline, the conſtant Succeſſion of the Chriſtian Church.) This extends the Privileges of the Miniſterial Function, to as many as ſhall be called to it regularly, while the World endures. And for ſuch, who are guilty of offering Indignities to them, though I judge them not, yet I ought to ſay, that it highly concerns them very ſeriouſly to examine and to judge themſelves for all the Injury and Diſeſteem, which, whether directly intended or not, is yet but too manifeſtly, in Fact and in Event, brought by their Means, not only upon a particular Perſon or Profeſſion, but upon Religion, and Good Manners in general. And let ſuch look well to it, whether their Conſcience can, or whether God be like to acquit them, of being, if not *Slanderers*, yet at leaſt *Hinderers* of his Word, and its Succeſs among them. John xx. 21.

2. *Secondly*, St. *Paul* argues here, that the peculiar Commendation of Perſons in this Poſt is their being *found faithful*; And that particularly, in bar to the Incroachments of Some, who bore themſelves high upon their boaſted Wit and Eloquence; and leſſened Others, who did not come as They did, with *Excellency of Speech* and *enticing Words of Man's Wiſdom*. To this Ver. 2. Chap. i. 2.

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Purpoſe he tells the *Corinthians*, that Art, and Ornament, and great Abilities, are not the Things for which Spiritual Stewards are properly accountable; theſe are Talents beſtowed by their Maſter, as he ſees fit: The Proportions, and the placing them out, are entirely in his Diſpoſal. They, to whom much is imparted, muſt have much to anſwer for; But be it more or be it leſs, that the Steward is intruſted with, ſtill his Fidelity may be the ſame: and only ſo much ſhall be charg'd to his Account, as was committed to his Management. The Servant in the Parable, who had improved *Two* Talents, received the ſame Praiſe, and a Reward proportionable, to His who had improv'd *Five*. And Reaſon good; ſince the ſame honeſt Diſpoſition, which kept him faithful in the Care of that little which was in his Power, would likewiſe have ſecured his Diligence and Integrity, in the Care of more, if more had been in his Power. And, when the Apoſtle argues, that therefore He and his Fellow-labourers ought not to be cenſur'd or deſpis'd for their unaffected plainneſs of Speech, or any other Circumſtances in the Figure they made, which might to worldly Men ſeem weak and deſpicable; The Inference, I think, is very juſt, that Poverty, unartful Preaching, nay ſome degree of Ignorance itſelf, when not wilful, or occaſion'd by Sloth and Vice, is not always blameable in, or juſt Ground of Diſregard to, Perſons of this Character. There are many Conſiderations, which may render this a Pitiable Caſe; but not any, that can make it a fit Subject of Mockery and Mirth. And if God himſelf judge theſe *Stewards of his Myſteries*, not by the Brightneſs of their Parts, the ſparkling Beauties of their Stile, or the Largeneſs of their acquir'd Knowledge; but by their Induſtry and honeſt Care, in uſing ſuch Abilities as they have, (mean though they be) to his Glory and Service; It will ill become Them, whoſe Servants they are not, to judge them upon theſe Accounts. And much more irreligious and inſolent yet it is, to expoſe them, upon any ſuch Preten-

Matt. xxv. 22, 23.

ces

ces, to the Deriſion of Men; who are ſo glad of every Occaſion, and triumph ſo exceedingly in the Diminution and Diſgrace of *them who labour among them and admoniſh them*; that they ſeem to practiſe the very Reverſe of the Apoſtle's Command, and inſtead of *eſteeming them highly*, do rather but think the more meanly of, and pour Spight and Contumely upon them, *for their Works ſake.* 1 Theſ. v. 12, 13.

3. *Thirdly*, This Deſcription of the Miniſterial Office is a ſeaſonable Warning to all who take it upon them, what Demeanour is ſuitable to ſo weighty a Charge, and how ſtrict a Reckoning they ſhall certainly be called to for it. For a Stewardſhip is the higheſt Truſt and of greateſt Concern in the Family; and therefore our Lord deſcribes it, by appointing the Perſons in it, *Rulers over their Lord's Houſhold, to give them Meat in due Seaſon.* The Direction of Souls, and Diſtribution of Spiritual Suſtenance, are Matters of Mighty Moment, ſuch as require the niceſt Fidelity, the moſt laborious Induſtry. The doing this in *due Seaſon*, that is, Watching all favourable Opportunities, accommodating one's ſelf to the different Exigencies and Circumſtances, the Capacities and Tempers of Men, aſks great Prudence, and ſerious Application of Thought. The Conſideration of acting in Truſt for another implies, that His Advantage ſhould be the chief and conſtant Aim, that, to which all Endeavours muſt be directed and by which all the Man's Meaſures muſt be govern'd. He, who makes his own Profit the End of his Diligence in this Affair, is an unfaithful Steward, and follows not his Maſter's Buſineſs, but his own. The Flock, and not the Fleece, muſt be the Shepherd's Care. The Nature of this Office will not allow either Waſte or Miſemployment; turning to none, or turning to our private Advantage, thoſe Goods, or that produce of them, which are entirely and of Right our Maſter's. Becauſe the Office is itſelf a Truſt, and every Truſt neceſſarily infers Ver. 1, 2. Matt. xxiv. 45.

an Account. Our Lord hath therefore told us beforehand, what ſhall be that Steward's Fate, who either *ſmites his Fellow-ſervants* (behaves himſelf inſolently in his Place, ſtretches his Juſt to a Tyrannical Power, and uſurps upon the Conſciences of his People) or *eats and drinks with the drunken* (indulges himſelf in Eaſe and Luxury, Profuſeneſs and Riot) that ſuch a one's *Lord will cut him aſunder*, and appoint him his *Portion with Hypocrites, in a Place of Weeping and Gnaſhing of Teeth.* And ſure, if any Sort of Wickedneſs heat Some Men's Furnace ſeven times hotter than Others; it muſt be Theirs, who live diſorderly in that Profeſſion, which devotes them to the more immediate Service of God and Goodneſs; Who abuſe the moſt important Confidence, that can poſſibly be repoſed in Man; who draw Scandal upon their Order and Religion, by becoming Ringleaders in Vice, inſtead of Patterns in Piety and Virtue; Who countenance Irreligion and Unbelief, by miniſtring juſt Suſpicions of their Preaching merely for a Trade; and in Compliance with Intereſt and Form, laying Reſtraints and Yokes upon others, which themſelves refuſe to ſubmit to, in their own Converſation.

Matt. xxiv. 48, 49, 50, 51.

4. *Fourthly*, Though the Miniſters of Chriſt are *Stewards* more immediately and eminently, yet every Man is truly ſuch, in what Capacity or Condition of Life ſoever Providence hath placed him. All are not *Stewards of the Myſteries of God* indeed, as theſe Men are: But this only argues a difference in the Talents, not a Freedom from the Truſt. For ſome Talent or other is committed to every Man, and ſuch, as he ſhall more aſſuredly be reckoned with for the Miſmanagement of. But of this I ſhall have a fitter Occaſion to treat hereafter, and therefore do only put my Reader in mind of it now, to quicken his Care, by this ſhort Mention here.

Goſpel for ix. S. *after* Trinity.

5. *Fifthly*, The Judgment which St. *Paul* profeſſes himſelf ſo little concern'd for, and diſſuades Others from

from the Exercise of, is not any Publick and Legal One, which Persons in Authority, whether Ecclesiastical or Civil, will pass upon notorious Offences. This is what the *Ministers of Christ*, as well as Others, are bound to submit, and pay great Deference to. But it is a Judgment of private Persons, supported by no Authority; a Judgment of Partiality and Affection, which meddles where it hath nothing to do, and tends unduly to exalt or depress Teachers, in the Opinion of the World, And in bar to This, he offers Two unanswerable Arguments. The One implied in their being *Ministers of Christ*, accountable to none but their Own Master; who will judge all their Actions one Day immediately by himself; and who in the mean while judges such as are of human Cognizance, by those who are deputed to act under him in an Authoritative Way. Consequently when private Persons take upon them to censure and condemn such, they incur the Guilt of *judging another Man's Servant*, which no body hath any just Warrant to do. The Other consists in This, that these Men neither have, nor can have, sufficient Proof to form a right Judgment upon. Because they cannot see into their Teacher's Conscience, and so, not being able to take a full and distinct View of the Principles he goes upon, must needs be liable to great Injustice, and many Mistakes, as oft as they shall presume to pass a Verdict upon what they see, the Equity whereof will depend upon somewhat, which as yet they cannot see. But it is not designed that Matters should for ever lie thus in the Dark. For He, whose proper Business it is to judge, will take a Time to lay all open, and bring the most secret Things and Intentions to Light. And this Declaration, that such a Discovery shall certainly be made, being, in my Apprehension, One great Motive, which induced our Church to make this Scripture a Part of the *Advent* Service; I think myself obliged, in Compliance with the Design of this solemn Season, to

Rom. xiv. 4. James iv. 12.

employ the Remainder of my Diſcourſe upon it. And therefore I will endeavour,

I. *Firſt*, To ſhew that the General Judgment ſhall extend, not only to Mens Overt, but even their moſt Secret Acts, nay, to the very Thoughts and Intentions of their Hearts: And then,

II. *Secondly*, To make ſome practical Inferences from this Doctrine; ſuch more particularly, as the Apoſtle hath led me to, in the Paſſage now before us.

I only think it neceſſary to premiſe, That, whereas the Occaſion of St. *Paul*'s Diſcourſe engaged him only in that part of the Argument, which concerns the Support good Men may find from it, when ſuffering under falſe Surmiſes, and unworthy Aſperſions: I ſhall ſpeak to this Point in its utmoſt Latitude; and will repreſent the Terror it ought to be to wicked Men and Hypocrites, who, when their Hearts are ſifted and laid open, ſhall as certainly have Puniſhment and Condemnation, as the Faithful *ſhall have* Reward and *Praiſe, of God.*

Ver. 5.

I. *Firſt*, then I ſay, The General Judgment, at the laſt Day, will not reſt in Overt Acts only, but reach to thoſe, which now lie moſt conceal'd, even to the Thoughts and Intentions of Mens Hearts. That thus we ſhall all be dealt with the Scripture is expreſs, The Preacher acquaints us, *That God ſhall bring every work into Judgment, with every ſecret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.* And St. *Paul*, beſides the Place now under Conſideration, hath another to the *Romans*, where making mention of the Day of Judgment, he ſtiles it, *The Day when God ſhall judge the Secrets of Mens Hearts by Jeſus Chriſt.* Hence *David* begs God to cleanſe him from his Secret Faults. Why? but becauſe Theſe as well as the moſt Open, if not forgiven, will certainly

Eccleſ. xii. 14.

Rom. ii. 16.

Pſal. xix. 12.

certainly be punished? Hence our Lord forbids his Disciples to affect Pomp and Shew, in their Alms, and Prayers, and Fastings; for this very substantial Reason, that no good Work of any kind is lost by the Privacy of it. But, even when these things are done *in secret, our Father which seeth in secret, himself shall reward them openly.* And indeed, though the Scripture had not declared thus much, yet the Assurance of a general Judgment sufficiently implies it; and we might upon very good Grounds conclude, that so it must needs be, from the Reason and Nature of the thing. Matt. vi. 4, 6, 18.

For the End and Business of this Judgment is positively said to be, *that every Man may receive the things done in his Body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.* But now such a Distribution cannot be regularly made, except the *hidden things of darkness be brought to light*, and even *the Counsels of Mens Hearts* charged in Account to them. And that for these two following Reasons. 2 Cor. v. 10.

I. *First*, Because the Seeds of all Wickedness spring up in the Heart. It is conceived, and born, and bred there; And the breaking out into Act is only the perfecting of that, which is come to Maturity, by being carried on, and cherished, in Thought and Intention. St. *James* hath described the whole Process of this monstrous Birth, in that memorable Text; *Every Man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own Lust and enticed. Then Lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth Sin; and Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth Death.* And our Saviour's Argument, that the things which defile a Man are not they which enter into him, but those which come forth of him, proceeds in this manner; *Out of the Heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a Man.* Hence we are so often call'd upon Jam. i. 14, 15. Matth. xv. 19, 20. James iv. 8.

to

1 Cor. ix. 27. Gal. v. 24. to *purify our Hearts*, as well as to *cleanſe our Hands*; to crucify, not our Fleſh only, and bring *our Body into Subjection*, but our Affections and Deſires too. Becauſe while the Fountain is tainted, the Streams iſſuing from it muſt of neceſſity be foul and bitter. And accordingly our Saviour's Reproof to the Phariſees, who blaſphemed his Miracles, is levelled at this inward Corruption, *O Generation of Vipers, how can ye, being evil, ſpeak good things? for out of the abundance of the Heart, the Mouth ſpeaketh. A good Man out of the good Treaſure of the Heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil Man out of the evil Treaſure, bringeth forth evil things.*

Matth. xii. 34, 35.

2. *Secondly*, The formal Difference of Moral Good and Evil, depends preciſely upon the Deſign and Intention, with which the thing is done. If this be bad, no other Conſideration can make the Action good. Nay, though any Defect render an Action bad in itſelf, yet none, with which the Will is not in ſome Degree chargeable, ſhall make it imputed as bad to the Doer. So that the ſame Act in appearance, when proceeding upon different Proſpects, and ſpringing from different Principles, as to its moral Conſideration, is by no means the ſame. Thus one Man may give Alms out of Charity, and another may give out of Oſtentation; One may pray from real Devotion to God, and Another may do it to be ſeen of Men: One may faſt for Mortification, and Another may faſt to acquire the Character of an extraordinary abſtemious and ſanctified Perſon. Both give, and faſt, and pray; but becauſe not Both upon the ſame Motive, therefore not Both with the ſame Acceptance and Succeſs. He who does any of theſe upon a worldly Principle, *hath*, our Lord tells us, *his Reward* already. He did it to be ſeen, and ſeen he is. This is the Coin, in which he deſired to be paid, and therefore he hath no Claim

Matth. vi. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 16, 18.

Claim to any Wages beſides. But they, who do theſe things out of pure Conſcience, and to approve their Love and Obedience to God, have an ample Compenſation in reſerve, and ſhall not be Loſers at laſt, tho' no preſent Profit be paid them down in hand. Now the Reaſon, why the Nature of Virtue and Vice, and the Award of every Man's Recompence, ſhould turn upon this Point, is very obvious. Beeauſe the Power of doing well or ill is not always in our own diſpoſal, but the Will to do either can never be out of it; and therefore This is what we muſt look to, and are ſtrictly anſwerable for. He that would do ill, but wants Means or Opportunity, contracts the ſame Guilt, as if the thing had been actually committed, becauſe his Mind approves and conſents to the Sin; And thus the Man, *who looks upon a Woman to luſt after her*, is ſaid to have *committed Adultery with her already in his Heart*. He that hath a ſincere Deſire and Diſpoſition to do good, but cannot; hath all the Merit, which thoſe Deſires, when fully effected, could give him. And thus the *Poor Widow's* two Mites are interpreted a Liberality, far exceeding the Gifts of thoſe Rich Men, who *out of their Abundance caſt in much* to the Offerings of God. The Reaſon of which, alledged in a like Caſe by St. *Paul*, will hold equally applicable to good Works of any kind whatſoever; that, *if there be firſt a willing Mind, it is accepted, according to that a Man hath, and not according to that he hath not.*

Matth. v. 28.

Mark xii. 41, 42, 43, 44.

2 Cor. viii. 12.

That thus it is, the Rules of Equity, and Juſtice among Men, make it plain. For even Earthly Judicatures meaſure the Fact by the Intention, and acquit or puniſh the Perſon accordingly. Killing a Man is the ſame Act, ſimply and abſtractedly conſidered, whether it be done by Chance, or in one's own Defence, or with Malicious purpoſe. But yet the Law looks and animadverts upon it indifferently, with regard to the Mind and

and Intent, wherewith the thing is done. In the firſt Caſe it is reputed pitiable, and innocent; in the ſecond, Excuſable, ſo far as to mitigate the Puniſhment; In the Laſt, Capital, and ſuch as ought to exclude from all Mercy. Now the only Reaſon, why nothing but Words and Actions are tried and puniſhed here below, is, becauſe the Thoughts and Imaginations of Mens Hearts are what we cannot come at the Knowledge of, any farther than Words and Actions let us into the Diſcovery of them. But this Reaſon is of no Force in the Proceedings of the laſt and General Judgment. There we have to do with *One, before whom all things are naked and open, a Diſcerner of Thoughts, a Searcher of Hearts,* and an *Underſtander* of our firſt Motions and *Imaginations*. Herein conſiſts the perfect Righteouſneſs of God's Judgment, that no one Innocent Man ſhall ſuffer, no one Guilty ſhall be there diſcharged; No Evaſion ſhall be left for the cloſeſt and moſt cunning Vice, no Recompence loſt to the moſt obſcure and unobſerved Virtue. And, ſince the univerſal Knowledge of this Judge qualifies him for doing Right to all; his Juſtice will vindicate itſelf, in weighing and detecting thoſe ſecret Springs, upon which the very Nature of a Good or Evil Action principally turns. And we need not be told, that Men are deſervedly reputed Good or Evil, not according to the Face and outward Appearance of their Actions; but by the inward Bent, and *Counſels of their Hearts.*

Heb. iv. 12.
1 Chron. xxviii. 9.
Pſal. cxxxix. 1.
1 Theſ. ii. 4.

II. I come now to draw ſome practical Inferences from this Point; ſuch in particular, as the Apoſtle hath improved it to, in the Paſſage at preſent before us.

And *Firſt*, This, as hath been often urged already, ſhould make us very ſparing and tender in our Cenſures of other Mens Behaviour. Becauſe in ſuch Caſes we often paſs Sentence, without ſo much as the Poſſibility of a ſufficient Proof. What they do we may know, but whence, and why they do it, we ſhall never know perfectly,

fectly, till the Secrets of all Hearts ſhall be revealed. And, ſince the ſame Act hath been ſhewed to vary, according to thoſe unſeen Springs, where the Motion firſt began; If we will be clean from Injuſtice, our Judgment muſt be ſuſpended, till thoſe too are brought into open View. In the mean while Charity obliges us to allow every thing the moſt favourable Conſtruction it can fairly bear; to abate for involuntary Ignorance, for Inadvertencies and Indiſcretions, for want of Opportunity to do better, for the many unavoidable Hindrances, and unforeſeen Accidents which may defeat the beſt Intention, and render the Man quite another Perſon from what we apprehend him. For, as St. *James* obſerves, *To him that knoweth to do good, and doth it not, to Him it is Sin.* James iv. 17. To One (that is) who can, but will not do it. And it happens very commonly, that thoſe Proceedings are ſeverely condemned in our Brethren, which yet would be our own, were Their Circumſtances and Difficulties Ours. So that the ſuſpending our definite Sentence, and forbearing to fix odious Characters upon Men, is no more than the conſtant Rule of Equity directs in all Caſes. Not to paſs Judgment, I mean, beyond what the Matter in Evidence will bear us out in.

But *Secondly*, If this Conſideration will not, as alas! there is but little Appearance that it ſhould, check the Licentious Tongues, and wicked Thoughts, of Cenſorious and over-buſy Men: Yet it may at leaſt be ſerviceable to the Support and Satisfaction of thoſe Good People, who are ſtruck at by their Slanders. For This gives to all ſuch a certain Proſpect of having their Integrity cleared, and thoſe Virtues, which are ſo much envied and traduced, proclaimed to all the World. Not One good Action, how vilely ſoever miſrepreſented in the mean while, ſhall then loſe its juſt Commendation or Reward; and thoſe falſe Tongues, ſo induſtrious to leſſen or blacken them, ſhall be covered with their own Confuſion, and found Liars before God

and

and all Mankind. So bright, ſo triumphant, ſhall Innocence, and an honeſt Mind, ſhine at that Day; So much more publick ſhall its Praiſe be then, than all the Aſperſions, which the moſt laborious Ill-Nature can caſt upon it here. But eſpecially ſo much more valuable is that Praiſe, becauſe beſtow'd by him, who cannot err in Judgment, and whoſe Acceptance it is our Duty to aim at, and prefer, before the Applauſes of the whole World. This made it, in

Ver. 3. St. *Paul's Account, ſo very ſmall a thing to be judged of Men*, becauſe Mens Judgment is not the Iſſue, we muſt ſtand or fall by. And therefore every One, who makes it his Buſineſs to diſcharge a good Conſcience, may and ought to bear up againſt any Offence or Miſconſtructions, that ſhall come from that Quarter; as remembring that he ſeeks not to pleaſe Men, but God. And though the Eſteem of Men be valuable in due Place and Proportion; yet if Men will not be ſatisfied with that which is juſt and right, well done or well intended, God will receive it kindly, reward it bountifully, and effectually expoſe Their Malice, and rectify Their Miſtakes, who thought and ſpoke amiſs of things that deſerved a better Treatment, and more candid Interpretation. So true is That in point of Reputation too, which St. *Peter* ſpeaks of Other, (but ſcarce more Senſible) Evils of Perſecution,

1 Pet. iii. 14, 15. *If ye ſuffer for Righteouſneſs ſake, happy are ye; and be not afraid of their Terror, neither be troubled. (i. e.)* Be not diſcouraged from perſevering even in that Good for which ye ſuffer wrongfully: *but ſanctify the Lord God in your Hearts. (i. e.)* Shew that you do it for His ſake, and are well content with His, his ſingle Approbation, though all the World ſhould defame and condemn you.

3. *Thirdly*, What a Mortifying Reflection ought this to be to all ungodly Men and Hypocrites, that there is a Day coming, when all their lurking Corruptions ſhall be brought out in their open Light, all their cunning

cunning Diſguiſes pulled off; and even thoſe Sins, in which they moſt affected Secrecy, laid bare, diſplay'd in their blackeſt Colours, and publiſh'd in the Hearing of all Mankind? Oh! What a World of Falſehood and Treachery, of Diſſimulation and Craft, will then appear plainly? What Treaſons and Murders, What perverting of Laws and Juſtice, What Adulteries and Laſciviouſneſs, What Abominations and Deeds of Darkneſs and Horror, will then cover the Face of Them, who have impoſed upon their Eaſy, or their Charitable Brethren; to ſee their long ſucceſsful Artifices detected, their counterfeit Zeal for God and the publick Good, their ſpecious Pretences of Right and Religion, which have been taken up purely to ſerve their Ambition or Vain Glory, to purſue a private Intereſt, or execute Deſigns of Baſeneſs, and Malice, and Villainy? What a Check ſhould this be to them, who indulge themſelves in ſecret Sins, to think, that their Cloſets, and their Beds, the thickeſt Walls, and the darkeſt Nights, cannot ſhut out that *Eye, which is in every Place*, and to which the *Darkneſs and Light are both alike?* How Vain, how Senſeleſs is it, to be awed with the Fear of Men, and not to conſider that publick Infamy and Contempt, which ſhall be poured upon them, when their moſt ſcandalous Practices ſhall be brought forth, and no Contrivance left to hide, or to varniſh them over? Conſider this, thou poor deluded Sinner: And, if thou wouldſt bluſh, and even die with Shame, to have thy own Family, or Neighbourhood, nay but a Servant or a Child, Witneſs to thy hidden Works of Diſhoneſty; hold thy Hand, Man, and flatter not thyſelf with a falſe Imagination, that theſe ſhall always lie hid: But be aſſured, thy God, thy Judge, diſcerns them at the very Inſtant of acting; and, that Acquaintance and Strangers, Friends and Enemies, all the Men that ever did, and all that ever ſhall live upon Earth, will certainly one day partake in their Diſcovery.

Prov. xv. 3. Pſal. cxxxix. 1, 2, 3, 12.

covery. What a Warning ſhould this be to every one of us, not only to govern our Actions, and to ſet a Watch upon our Words, but even to keep a ſtrict and conſtant Guard upon our Thoughts, to cheriſh no Malice or Envy, no Injuſtice or Uncleanneſs, even there; to practiſe no manner of Diſſimulation or Double-dealing with either God or Man; ſince the Secrets of every Kind are ſure to be diſcloſed, every Heart to be weighed in the Balance, and ſifted to the very bottom; and nothing will abide the Strictneſs of that Teſt, but undiſſembled Holineſs, and perfect Sincerity? In a Word, Whatſoever it be, that we would not do, or ſay, or think, were our Breaſts tranſparent, were all the World to ſtand by and look on, were they that wiſh us worſt to examine every Corner of our Hearts, and report what they find there; all That the Scripture now before us produces an undeniable Reaſon, why we ſhould not allow ourſelves in. For it aſſures us, that how cloſely ſoever we may cover, or how cunningly ſoever we may carry our Wickedneſs at preſent, all will be ſure to come out at laſt, to our eternal Puniſhment, and indelible Reproach. There are but very few, I fear of ſo clear a Character, that they would be content Other People, perhaps that their beſt Friends, ſhould know as much of them in all particulars, as They know of themſelves: And yet all this, and a great deal more, is perfectly known already, and ſhall be known to all Mankind at the Day of Judgment. Which leads me to the Laſt Thing I intend to infer from this Diſcourſe of St. *Paul* at preſent; and that is,

4. *Fourthly*, Humility, and a Holy Jealouſy over our ſelves, neceſſary even for the beſt Men. For to this Reflection that Declaration leads us, *Yea, I judge not my own ſelf; For I know nothing by myſelf: Yet am I not hereby juſtified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord.* Had theſe Words fallen from ſome careleſs Pen, One who ſooth'd himſelf up in a falſe Security; and took no Pains to ſearch into Things, which,

Ver. 3, 4.

which, when found and known, were like to give him Trouble; they had not deſerved our ſo particular Regard. For many ſuch there are, who in Affliction, upon Sick Beds, or other ſolemn Seaſons of Examination and Repentance, *know nothing by themſelves*, and are much exalted with the Quiet and Clearneſs of their own Conſciences. And yet it often happens, that the Faults and Failings of theſe very Perſons have been ſo numerous, ſo notorious, that every impartial Stander-by can ſhew them to themſelves, of a Complexion far different from That, with which their own falſe Glaſſes flatter them. But when a Perſon ſo circumſpect in his Conduct, ſo zealous in his Miniſtry, ſo ſevere a Searcher of his Conſcience, as St. *Paul*, ſupported too by ſo clear a Teſtimony, did not yet dare to rely upon this Iſſue, but appeals to a higher and more diſcerning Judge; How ſhall Any, how the Beſt and moſt Wary of Us, preſume to anſwer our Hearts before that Tribunal? 'Tis true, as St. *John* ſays, *if our Hearts condemn us not, then we have Confidence towards God.* But, 'tis as true, which St. *John* reminds us of at the ſame time, *that God is greater than our Hearts, and knoweth all things.* If our Conſcience condemn us, we may be ſure God will do ſo too; becauſe we cannot know more of ourſelves, than he knows of Us; But if that condemn us not, it will not follow from hence, that we have nothing, which deſerves to be condemned: becauſe God knows More of us, than we know of ourſelves. The Peace of Conſcience, which ariſes from a due Enquiry, and comfortable Anſwer, concerning the State of our Souls, may be allowed indeed to give us Confidence; that is, a good Degree of Hope and Truſt, that God will accept our Sincerity, and over-look many Things for the Sake of his Son, and in Conſideration of our hearty Deſire to do better, and our conſtant Care never wilfully to do any thing amiſs. But can we be confident too, that we have not really done

1 John iii. 20, 21.

any Thing amiſs? No, God help us, no ſuch Matter. Alas! How many Opportunities of doing *Good* have been ſlip'd and neglected, even by them, who are watchful not to do *Evil?* And yet for Sins of Omiſſion only, not for doing Evil, but for not doing Good, it is, that we read *the Goats on the left Hand* are ſentenced to *everlaſting Puniſhment*. The unprofitable Servant was caſt into *utter Darkneſs* for not improving His Talent, and do we not uſually account it a great Commendation not to have waſted, or groſly miſemploy'd Ours? How few are ſo nice, as to be reproach'd by their own Breaſts for the Time loſt in impertinent Formalities, and innocent Diverſions; for the Wealth ſpent in Superfluity and Pomp, and any Delights not directly ſinful; for the Study and Wit employ'd upon uſeleſs Curioſities, and (to ſay the beſt and gentleſt thing of it) ſuch as tend to adorn, but not at all to amend the Man? But farther yet, allowing a Conduct prudent and unblameable even in theſe Matters; who is He, that hath not Multitudes of Faults committed in Paſſion and Surpriſe, never attended to, when they were committed; and More, which he did attend to, but through Prejudice or Miſtake, conſidered them as no Faults; and More ſtill, which, when done, and ſtinging him with Remorſe, he aſſwaged the Anguiſh of, by pouring falſe Balm into the Wound, and ſkinned over the Sore with partial Extenuations; and Moſt of all, which he knew to be Faults, and for a while was touched with Sorrow for them, but hath now abſolutely forgotten them, as if they had never been? Now of all Theſe there is a faithful Regiſter in Heaven, a full and critical Account where every Fact is enter'd, its Quality truly ſtated, each of its aggravating Circumſtances charged down to us, Not One overlooked, not One Miſrepreſented. And to Perſons mindful of this, it cannot, I think, ſeem ſtrange, that St. *Paul* does not inſiſt upon the Teſtimony of his own Breaſt, for the final Iſſue, upon which the great

Matt. xxv. 41, 42, 43.

Matt. xxv. 26, 27, 28, 29, 30.

great Reckoning was to be adjuſted. This, it is true, was his *Rejoicing*, as he profeſſes upon another Occaſion, becauſe it argued his *Sincerity*; but yet he laid not ſo great Streſs upon it, as from thence to inſiſt upon his Juſtification. For the moſt unblemiſhed Sincerity is far ſhort of Innocence; *and they who ſay they have no Sin, deceive themſelves, and the truth is not in them.* And, if the Caſe ſtood thus with ſo eminent an Apoſtle, well ſure may we lay our Mouths in the Duſt, and cry out with *David, If thou, Lord, ſhouldſt be extreme, to mark what is done amiſs, O Lord, who may abide it? But there is Mercy with Thee, therefore ſhalt thou be feared.* And indeed herein lies the ineſtimable Comfort and Advantage of an honeſt and peaceful Mind, that it entitles us to Mercy. But ſtill Mercy is our Laſt, our Only Refuge: For by a judgment without Mercy no Fleſh living, not the moſt Holy, nor the moſt Circumſpect, can be juſtified. And therefore the brighteſt Virtue ſets no Man above Humble and Awful Apprehenſions of this dreadful Tribunal; becauſe the brighteſt Virtue is ſtill but Human Virtue. As Human it muſt be debaſed with a great Allay of Frailty, and manifold Imperfections. It can have nothing to boaſt of, nothing to claim, as a ſtrict and adequate Reward; but Much, very Much, to aſk Forgiveneſs for, and a kind Conſtruction of, at the Hands of Almighty God. Happy then are They, and they only, who, in that laſt and moſt important Juncture, ſhall be *found in Jeſus Chriſt, not having their own Righteouſneſs which is of Works, but that Righteouſneſs which is of God by Faith*; Such I mean, as truſts not in its own weak and unworthy Performances, but relies entirely on the Merits and Mediation of Him, who is not only our Judge, but our Saviour, our Peace, and our Propitiation. *To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghoſt, Three Perſons and One God, be all Honour and Glory for ever.* Amen.

2 Cor. i. 12.

1 John i. 8.

Pſalm cxxx. 3, 4.

Phil. iii. 9.

The GOSPEL.

PARAPHRASE. St. Matth. xi. 2.

2. *John Baptiſt*, being now impriſoned by *Herod*, and the publick Exerciſe of his Miniſtry at an end, as his Life was ſhortly to be; that his Diſciples might be turned over to a better Maſter, in whom they were not yet fully ſatisfied;

2. *NOW when John had heard in the priſon the Works of Chriſt, he ſent two of his Diſciples;*

3. He ſends them, upon the report of Chriſt's Miracles, to aſk Jeſus, whether he was the Meſſias, that eminent Perſon, who, for the frequent Prophecies and general Expectation of his Approach, was ſtiled *He that ſhould come.*

3. *And ſaid unto him, Art Thou He that ſhould come, or do we look for another?*

4, 5. To this our Lord returned no direct Anſwer, but only bad them obſerve, and relate faithfully, the Miracles they had now ſeen, as well as heard, and compare the Prophecies concerning the Meſſias with his Actions, which would be ſufficient Direction for forming a right Judgment of this Matter. Among theſe diſtinguiſhing Characters, One is, that the Poor ſhould be particularly addreſs'd to by Chriſt, and receive his Doctrines with great Readineſs and Succeſs.

4. *Jeſus anſwered and ſaid unto them, Go and ſhew John again the things which ye do hear and ſee:*

5. *The blind receive their ſight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleanſed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raiſed up, and the poor have the Goſpel preached unto them.*

6. Another, that great Offence would be taken at him. But They were the happy Men, who ſuffered no worldly Reſpects, no Meanneſs in his Appearance, to prejudice them againſt the Belief and Practice of what he taught.

6. *And bleſſed is he, whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.*

7. When theſe Diſciples of *John* were diſmiſt, our Lord ſpeaks very glorious things in

7. *And as they departed, Jeſus began to ſay unto the Multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the Wilderneſs to ſee? A reed ſhaken with the wind;*

his Commendation, that this Perſon whom the People went into the Wilderneſs to viſit, was not like a *Reed ſhaken with the Wind*, a Man fickle and inconſtant in his Principles.

8. *But what went ye out for to ſee? A man cloathed in ſoft Raiment; Behold, they that wear ſoft cloathing, are in Kings houſes.*

8. Nor of Gaiety and outward Pomp, but one of ſingular Auſterity;

9. *But what went ye out for to ſee? A Prophet; yea, I ſay unto you, and more than a Prophet;*

9. And above the rate of common Prophets, as ſeeing that Meſſias, and perſonally ſhewing him to the World, whom the reſt only foreſaw and foretold at a diſtance.

10. *For this is he of whom it is written, Behold I ſend my Meſſenger before thy Face, which ſhall prepare thy way before thee.*

10. And not only ſo, but himſelf a Subject of their Prophecies, particularly that noted one of *Malachi*, who deſcribes him, as the Harbinger and immediate Forerunner of God coming in the Fleſh, to viſit his Temple at *Jeruſalem*, and, by his Baptiſm and Doctrine of Repentance, fitting Men for the Reception of Chriſt.

COMMENT.

IN explaining this Goſpel, Three Things eſpecially deſerve our Attention.

I. *Firſt, The Deſign of the Meſſage.*

II. *Secondly, The Method our Bleſſed Lord takes to ſatisfy that Enquiry, whether he were the true Meſſias.*

III. *Thirdly, The Teſtimony he gives here to the Baptiſt.*

I. I begin with *the Deſign of this Meſſage:* which, we are told, was ſent by *John*, when a Priſoner, and occaſioned by that Relation, which his Diſciples had made to him, of our Lord's growing Fame, and great Miracles. Now theſe are very ſignificant Circumſtances, and ſuch as give a conſiderable Light into the Matter under Examination. Luke vii. 18, 19.

The Scriptures, upon all Occaſions, acquaint us, that

the Baptiſt, through the whole Courſe of his Miniſtry, had borne conſtant and ample Teſtimony to the Bleſſed Jeſus; *That* he exhorted Them who came to him, to reſt their Faith, not on Himſelf, but on Him *that ſhould come after him:* That he diſclaimed all Pretenſions to his own being the *Meſſiah*, even before he had ſeen and known him that was ſo; *That* he afterwards received an expreſs and undoubted Revelation, declaring which that Perſon was, by a viſible Deſcent of the Holy Spirit, and a Voice from Heaven, at our Lord's Baptiſm: *That* he made it his Buſineſs, both in publick and private, to diſpoſe the *Jews* in general, and his own Diſciples in particular, to believe, and reverence, and obey *Jeſus*. All this was done before his Impriſonment. And we ſhall offer great Injury to the Character of that excellent Perſon, in ſuppoſing his Conſtancy ſo ſhaken, or his Opinion and Behaviour ſo inconſiſtent with themſelves; as, after ſuch irrefragable Evidence, ſuch open and ſolemn Declarations of his Faith, to admit any Doubt, whether this were *He that ſhould come*, the long-promiſed, the univerſally expected Meſſias; or whether Men were ſtill to *look for Another*, in whom theſe Promiſes and Expectations ſhould receive their due and deſired Accompliſhments.

Acts xix. 4. John i. 25, 32, 33. Matt. iii. 16, 17. Luke iii. 21, 22, John i. 29, 30, 32, 34. iii. 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, &c.

Some indeed have thought, that the Importance of this Queſtion was, whether Jeſus ſhould die for the Redemption of Mankind. But ſurely He, who long before had ſtiled him, *the Lamb of God that takes away the Sin of the World*; And, in all likelihood, choſe to expreſs himſelf ſo, with Alluſion to the Sacrifices ſlain under the *Jewiſh* Law, gives ſufficient Intimation, that He was not ignorant of this great Truth. And, for that other Pretence of St. *John*'s deſiring to know, whether he ſhould come to the place of Souls departed, and preach Salvation to Them; this may be juſtly looked

John i. 29, 34.

Τῦτο δὲ ἀγνόητον. Theoph. in Luc.

looked upon, as an Imagination ſo extravagant, ſo very foreign to the Matter in hand, as not deſerve a particular Conſideration.

From hence, I think, we may fairly conclude, that the Baptiſt did not ſend this Meſſage, with a Deſign to ſatisfy any Scruples of his own; but purely for the Sake and Conviction of them who brought it: To ſet them right in their Notions, and confirm them in the Belief of *Jeſus*; and ſo turn them over to their proper and better Maſter, now that himſelf was upon the point of leaving the World. And this was the more neceſſary, becauſe their intemperate Zeal and partial Reſpect for *John*, had hitherto made them averſe to *Jeſus*, and envious at his Honour and Miracles. What had been diſcourſed to them formerly upon this Subject, having therefore had but little Effect, *John*, in Compaſſion to their Infirmity, condeſcends to have their Scruples propounded in his own Name. And, as this Addreſs of the Baptiſt is remarkable, in providing ſo tenderly for his Diſciples better Information; So is that of our Lord no leſs, in his Manner of giving it, which leads me to the

II. *Second* Thing. The Method made choice of to ſatisfy that Enquiry, whether *Jeſus* were the true Meſſias. As all that *John* had ſaid in Commendation of *Jeſus* might paſs, with Diſciples thus prepoſſeſs'd, for an Effect of his Humility and great Modeſty: So any direct Anſwer, which *Jeſus* had made to this Queſtion, might have been eluded by the Objection made elſewhere by the Jews, *Thou beareſt Record of thyſelf, thy Record is not true.* And therefore he refers them to another ſort of Evidence, That of Miracles and Prophecies. And, deſiring only a faithful Report of what themſelves ſaw and heard, leaves them to their own Maſter, for the Concluſions to be drawn from thence. So that the Argument in ſhort lies thus: Such and ſuch Things are laid down by the Pro- John viii. 13.

phets, for certain Marks and Characters, by which the Meſſiah may be known at his coming; The Diſciples of *John* had ocular Demonſtration of theſe Marks agreeing to *Jeſus*; Therefore they ought moſt aſſuredly to believe that *Jeſus* was *He that ſhould come*, and that, after ſuch Evidence of his being ſo, they were not *to look for Another*. Now, in order to our diſcerning the force of this Argument, I ſhall conſider it in both its Parts. And *Firſt*, Concerning Miracles, I will ſhew,

1. *Firſt*, What Evidence Miracles in general are, that the Perſon working them is a Teacher ſent by God.

2. *Secondly*, How our Saviour's Miracles in particular, proved Him to be that eminent Teacher, diſtinguiſhed by the Title of *Meſſias*, or *He that ſhould come*.

1. The Former of theſe Enquiries ſhall be fully ſpoken to * hereafter, and is the leſs neceſſary here; becauſe, though the alledging of Miracles in general was a good Proof to *John*'s Diſciples, ſo far as it went; yet this alone did not reach the point in Queſtion. It proved Jeſus to come from God: But many Others had come from God too, and had given the Evidence of Miracles that they did ſo. But the main Difficulty lies yet behind; The other Prophets came indeed, but not any of them was *He that ſhould come*, ſo as to diſcharge Men *from looking for Another*; and therefore this neceſſarily engages us in the

* *Goſpel for iid. Sunday after* Epiph.

2. *Second* Enquiry. How thoſe particular Miracles wrought by *Jeſus*, prove Him and no other, to be the true Meſſias. This is the Prophet foretold by *Moſes*, in whom every Soul that believed not, was threatened with utter Deſtruction. And, ſince he was to be received with a Deference ſuperior to any Prophet beſides; it is but reaſonable to expect ſome Marks, by attending to which, Men might be deliver'd from the Danger of miſtaking any Prophet beſides for the Meſſias. Again, ſince Mi-

Deut. xviii. 15. Acts iii. 22.

racles were the Proof of coming from God, common to All that brought any new Revelation; And none but He came so, as that Men were not to look for Another; it is necessary, that his Miracles should have some peculiar Characters, whereby the Person doing these might be known to be the *Messias*; and distinguished from any other Person, who should do *Miracles*, and yet was not the Messias. Now, not to insist at present upon any Considerations, but what the Passage now in Hand gives fair Intimation of, there are, I think, Two Things observable in our Blessed Saviour's Miracles, which cannot be attributed to those of any others; And Both of them acknowledg'd to be Distinctions of the Messiah, from any Meaner Prophet. And they are,

1. The Number of them. That the *Messiah* should excel all that ever went before him in this Respect, appears to have been the constant Opinion of the *Jews*. Hence, some, we find, undertook to vindicate their going over to him with that Argument: *Many of the People believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more Miracles, than these which this Man hath done?* John vii. 31. And hence our Lord seems to charge his Enemies with Perverseness, and a peevish Malice, in Terms that admit their Incredulity to have had some Excuse, in case any Teacher besides had given equal Demonstration of a Divine Commission. *If I had not done among them* (says he) *the Works which no other Man did, they had not had Sin; but now have they both seen and hated both Me and my Father.* John xv. 24.

2. Their Quality. By which I mean, not only that Christ's Miracles were, in regard of the Beholders, and in common Estimation at least, greater, more stupendous Demonstrations of a Divine Power, than those exhibited by any other Prophet; but also, that They were such, as the doing of had many Ages before been foretold, for an infallible Sign to distinguish the Messiah by. Those,

Thoſe, in particular, mention'd in this Goſpel, are ſingled out as ſuch by *Iſaiah*; Who deſcribes the Happy State of Chriſt's Kingdom, by Benefits, which were never fully and literally accompliſhed in any other Perſon. For, though ſome of the Prophets might, upon very important Occaſions, be enabled to work one, or a few ſuch Miracles; yet to make it a general Practice in all Kinds, at all Places and Times, was ſo peculiar to *Jeſus*, as to be an incommunicable Property, and unconteſtable Argument of his being the Chriſt.

But there is ſomewhat more yet, which I would ſay upon this Occaſion. It is, that theſe Miracles were exceedingly well choſen, to Characterize the *Meſſiah*, in regard of their ſuitableneſs to the Deſign of his Coming. The Law was enacted with a very terrible Pomp, ſuch as ſpoke it to be, what indeed it was, a Diſpenſation of Servitude and great Severity. But the Goſpel is a Covenant of Reconciliation and Peace, of Friendſhip, nay of Sonſhip, with God; intended, not ſo much to ſtrike an Awe upon Mens Minds, as to charm and win them over with all the endearing Methods of Gentleneſs and Love. And therefore the Wonders, that bore Teſtimony to its Truth, were Works of Mercy and Pity. And the kind Relief they brought to the Bodies, reſembled the infinite Compaſſion and tender Regard, which this Meſſiah expreſs'd for the Souls of Men. The Ancient Prophets proved their Commiſſion by Acts of Divine Vengeance and ſore Plagues, as well as by Cures and corporal Deliverances; But our Lord *went about* always *doing Good*; reſcuing wretched Creatures from the Tyranny and Poſſeſſion of Evil Spirits; healing Diſeaſes and Infirmities, but inflicting none; releaſing from Death, but never haſtening it; inſomuch that, throughout the whole Courſe of our Saviour's Miniſtry, we have not any one Inſtance of his Power demonſtrated, in the Suffering or Harm even of his bittereſt Enemies. And thus the Argument is inconteſtable, with regard to theſe Diſciples, who came to propound

Acts x. 38.

propound this Queſtion. For if the Meſſiah was to ſignalize himſelf by Miracles, then *John* (for whoſe Honour they were ſo zealouſly concern'd) could not poſſibly be that Perſon; becauſe it is expreſly ſaid, that *John did no Miracle.* John x. 41.
And, if the Meſſiah were to be known by ſome particular ſorts of Miracles, then Jeſus muſt of neceſſity be that Perſon; becauſe the Miracles, foretold to be wrought by the Meſſiah, were done by Jeſus, and had been done by no other Perſon whatſoever.

2. The other Branch of this Teſtimony conſiſts in the Agreement of our Lord's Behaviour, and the Reſentments of Men in Regard to it, with what had been foretold concerning the Meſſiah.

The former in thoſe Words, *The Poor have the Goſpel preached unto them.* A Paſſage taken out of *Iſaiah*, and applied by Jeſus to himſelf, in his famous Sermon at *Nazareth*. And though not ſtrictly a Miracle, yet conſiderable enough to be made a Diſtinction of Chriſt, who was in this reſpect ſingular: As addreſſing himſelf chiefly to People of low Degree, whom the *Jewiſh* Doctors held in ſuch Contempt, that it was look'd upon as a reaſonable Ground of reproach to them who believ'd his Doctrine, that they were Men of no figure in the World. *Have any of the Phariſees or of the Rulers believed on him? But this People, who knoweth not the Law, are curſed.* And alſo the Predictions concerning the Goſpel, and the Entertainment it ſhould find, ſpeak of it, as a Syſtem accommodated to Men of humble Spirits; and, that its Succeſs ſhould be moſt remarkable among the Contrite, the Meek, and thoſe who were moſt diſintereſted, and reſigned, and mortified to the Vanities and Advantages of the preſent World.

Iſaiah lxi. 1. Luke iv. 18, 21.

John vii. 48, 49.

Pſal. xxv. 8, 9, 14. Iſaiah lvii. 15. lxvi. 2, 5.

The Latter of theſe Inſtances relates to the Offence, which

Iſaiah viii. 14. xxviii. 16. Pſal. cxviii. 22. 1 Pet. ii. 6, 7, 8. Iſaiah liii. 2, 3.

which ſhould be taken at the Meſſiah, to the great Danger and Unhappineſs of them who took it. And this was likewiſe very proper to be mention'd, both with regard to thoſe Diſciples in particular, whoſe Partiality to their Maſter gave them a Concern in this Warning; And in general, to remove that too common Hindrance of believing in Jeſus, which proceeded from his being deſpiſed or rejected of Men. Whereas it appears, from the Characters given of him in the *Old Teſtament*, that this was ſo far from being a juſt Objection againſt *Jeſus* being the Chriſt; as to render it impoſſible for any one to have been ſo, who did not meet with ſuch Oppoſition and contumelious Treatment.

Thus I have done with my *Second* Head, and ſhall ſay but little to my

III. *Third*, The Teſtimony given by our Lord to the Baptiſt. I have already, in my Paraphraſe, obſerved, that he is ſuppoſed to commend *John* for his Firmneſs and Conſtancy of Mind, in oppoſing him to a *Reed ſhaken with the Wind.* For his Auſterity and Strictneſs of Life, in Oppoſition to *a Man cloathed in ſoft Raiment*; And to declare him not only *a Prophet but more than a Prophet*, in regard of his having the Privilege of ſhewing the Meſſias to the People perſonally and preſent, whom the reſt only foreſaw at a great Diſtance; and being ſo conſiderable, as himſelf to furniſh Matter for a Prophecy, as the immediate Harbinger of God Incarnate.

All I ſhall add upon this Matter, is only a Remark of the great Goodneſs and Prudence of our Bleſſed Lord, in the timing and adapting this Commendation, to the preſent Circumſtances and Advantage of *John*.

Ver. 7. Luke vii. 24.

He forbears ſaying any thing in his Praiſe, till his Diſciples were gone; to avoid the Imputation of Flattery, or of any indirect Methods to inſinuate himſelf into their Affections and

good

good Esteem. He justifies his Constancy, when the Question just before propounded might minister some Suspicion, that his Sufferings had wrought some Change in him, and filled him with Doubts, by no means consistent with the Declarations, he had so freely and publicly made heretofore, concerning *Jesus* being the very Christ. He applauds his Austerity, to them, who admired it formerly, but had heard it cavilled at by the governing Party. And he sets him above any of the Prophets, when in Prison and ready to be sacrificed; to prevent that too common Fault of measuring Mens Deserts by their Fortune in the World; and to shew, that, in the lowest Decline of Oppression and Disgrace, he was in no Degree less worthy of Veneration, than when at his highest Glory, surrounded with Proselytes and Admirers, upon the Banks of *Jordan*, and heard by *Herod* with the greatest Reverence and Delight.

Luke vii. 29, 30, 33.

Thus much shall serve for the Heads I propounded to treat of. I will now just mention some few Inferences, very easy, and very fit, to be deduced from them, and so conclude this Discourse. And,

1. *First*, This Question from *John*'s Disciples, and their continuing still doubtful and dissatisfied about a Truth, which he had taken such Pains to bring them over to, ought to make us sensible, how great an Advantage it is to sound Belief and a good Life, to keep our Minds free and open to the Force of Reason and Religion; and how fatal an Obstruction to both, when they are darkened and barr'd up by Interest or Prejudice, by partial Affection, and having Mens Persons in Admiration. In such Cases the clearest Light, and the strongest Arguments will not serve to gain Access. Since that may, with some little Change, be observed of very many so blinded and biassed, which we plainly find to be true of these Enquirers here before us; They will not believe *Jesus* to be the Christ, because determined already not to allow him greater than *John*. The Application

plication is eaſy to any undue ſort of Prepoſſeſſions, whether for, or againſt Perſons or Things; And I charge my Reader with the making it ſincerely, ſo far as he finds himſelf concern'd in it: And I fear there are but few, in compariſon, who may not, upon ſtrict Examination, find themſelves more or leſs to need this Caution.

2. *Secondly*, From the Method taken to ſatisfy this Doubt, we may obſerve what ſort of Evidence the Chriſtian Religion ſtands upon. Miracles, done frequently, publickly, before Unbelievers, before Enemies, Men who could not deny, and yet would have been glad with all their Hearts to find any Flaw in them, any Shelter for their Infidelity. Theſe carried in them a ſufficient Conviction. But to whom? To all who would attend to them, who would compare Prophecies and Events, and acknowledge Him for the Meſſias, in whom theſe Two concurr'd. But even theſe did not pretend to bear down Prejudice, and Paſſion, peeviſh and reſolute Perverſeneſs. Bleſſed are they that are not offended, becauſe they ſubmit to that Proof, which Almighty God hath given of his Truth, and are content to hearken to Reaſon, in deſpite of all the Solicitations of the World, and corrupt Nature to the contrary. But ſtill *offended* many will be. Religion will always be ſpoken againſt; and the Rock, on which our Hopes are Built, will continue *a ſtone of ſtumbling to the unbelieving and diſobedient*. And ſince we have fair Warning that thus it will be, this ought not to diſſettle us in our Principles, but rather to confirm us, in the Belief of a Goſpel, whoſe Truth is manifeſt, even in this Particular too. It ſhould awaken our Care and Circumſpection, that, while ſo many are ready to deſpiſe and take Offence at Chriſt and his Word, we be not found among them, that contribute to, or give juſt Occaſion for it. No, rather let us labour by a more vigorous Zeal for God, and unwearied Perſeverance in well-

1 Pet. ii. 8.

well-doing, to put to Silence the Ignorance and Malice of fooliſh and gain-ſaying Men.

3. *Thirdly*, It may not be unſeaſonable upon this Occaſion, to obſerve the Seaſon proper for Miracles. They are neceſſary to eſtabliſh new Doctrines, and to convert Unbelievers; but when alledged for Doctrines ſufficiently eſtabliſhed already; when wrought or boaſted of, only among People, already poſſeſſed with a Belief of the Points, they are made to countenance; When in a manner, that ſeems to fear the being obſerved, or detected rather, by thoſe of a contrary Perſuaſion; They are then quite out of proper Time and Place, and do not create Faith, ſo much as Suſpicion of Fraud. Our Lord proved the Force of his Miracles, by ſhewing their Agreement with the Predictions, that ſuch ſhould be wrought by the Meſſias. But the ſame Lord hath warned Us, that *in the laſt Days* there ſhall be *lying Wonders*; and therefore we have Reaſon to believe that the pretended Workers of them in thoſe Days, are *falſe Prophets and falſe Chriſts*. So great a Difference there is between the miracles of Chriſt, which were foretold on purpoſe that men might believe and be ſaved by them; and thoſe Wonders of a more modern Date, which were foretold, on purpoſe that Men might not believe, and be ſeduced by them. Matt. xxiv. 24, 26.

4. *Laſtly*, When St. *John Baptiſt* here is ſaid to *prepare the way of the Lord before him*, we ſhould do well to recollect, wherein that Preparation conſiſted. And every one in his Station, but eſpecially the Miniſters of the Goſpel, who are Meſſengers ſent expreſs upon this Errand, ſhould be careful to make ready the way to his Second, as that Harbinger did for his Firſt, Coming. For the Preparations are, in both Caſes, the ſame; Making guilty People ſenſible of their Sins, reproving open Wickedneſs, unmaſking Hypocriſy, beating down Spiritual Pride; importuning

ing Men to Repentance; by repreſenting, with a faithful Zeal, the horrible Miſchiefs, and dreadful Concluſion of a wicked Courſe of Life, and the Terrors of that Maſter, who at his coming to purge the Floor, will not fail to ſeparate moſt nicely between the Wheat and the Chaff, and burn the latter with unquenchable Fire. We ſhall do well to take the Baptiſt for an Example of our conduct too; in giving Weight to our Doctrines by a Life of ſevere Virtue; by boldly rebuking Vice, even in the Greateſt, when Duty and a fit Opportunity call us to it; And, if by This we fall under their Diſpleaſure, ſuffering with a Conſtancy like His: and, even by our Deaths, bearing Teſtimony to God and his Truth. Theſe things, duly attended to, would make a mighty Change, even in a profligate and profane World. And, as it is our Duty (Ours eſpecially who are Miniſters of Chriſt) to purſue them vigorouſly: So the Bleſſed Effects of reforming Mankind are ſo very many, ſo very great, as to deſerve our daily fervent Prayers, that God would promote and ſucceed the Good Work. And this our Church hath taught us to recommend very pertinently to the Divine Favour and Aſſiſtance, in the Collect for this Day.

O Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who at thy firſt Coming didſt ſend thy Meſſenger to prepare thy Way before thee; Grant that the Miniſters, and Stewards of thy Myſteries, may likewiſe ſo prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the Hearts of the Diſobedient to the Wiſdom of the Juſt, that, at thy ſecond Coming to judge the World, we may be found an Acceptable People in thy ſight, who liveſt and reigneſt with the Father, and the Holy Ghoſt, ever one God, World without end.

The Fourth Sunday in Advent.

The COLLECT.

O Lord, raiſe up (We pray thee) thy Power, and come among us, and with great Might ſuccour us; that whereas through our Sins and Wickedneſs, we are ſore let and hindered in running the Race that is ſet before us, thy bountiful Grace and Mercy may ſpeedily help and deliver us, through the Satisfaction of thy Son our Lord; to whom with Thee and the Holy Ghoſt be Honour and Glory, World without end. *Amen.*

Pſal. lxxx. 2.
Heb. xii. 1.
Pſal. cxix. 32.

The EPISTLE.

Phil. iv.

PARAPHRASE.

4. *REjoice in the Lord alway, and again I ſay, Rejoice.*

4. Support your Spirits with a Holy and Spiritual Joy; and how unſeaſonable ſoever this Advice may ſeem to your preſent State of Affliction, yet I muſt urge it again, as a Duty fitting all Times and Conditions of Life.

5. *Let not your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.*

5. Be not rigorous in inſiſting upon your utmoſt Right, nor impatient in ſuffering Wrong, but let your Temper and Compoſure of Mind be manifeſt to all ſorts of People, and upon all Occaſions. For conſider, that the Judge is not far off, who will certainly make you amends for all your Condeſcenſions, and reward all your Patience.

6. *Be careful for nothing: but in every thing by prayer and ſupplication with thankſgiving, let your requeſts be made known unto God.*

6. Let no Difficulties make you immoderately anxious, but commit all your Affairs to God in Prayer for his Aſſiſtance, ſo as at the ſame time to acknowledge his Goodneſs in all the Calamities which befal you.

7. *And the Peace of God which paſſeth all underſtanding, ſhall keep your hearts and minds thro' Chriſt Jeſus.*

7. Thus if ye do, the Senſe of a Reward in Chriſt Jeſus, will be a ſtrong Guard againſt all your Trials, and ſecure to you ſuch an Evenneſs and inward Satisfaction of Mind, as we are not able to expreſs or conceive.

COMMENT.

ST. *Paul*, in this Paſſage, exhorts the *Philippians* to the Practice of ſome Virtues, which are not only uſeful and proper to all Sorts, and all Conditions of Chriſtians; but more particularly ſeaſonable to an afflicted and perſecuted State. Such as he had before in his Firſt and Third Chapters, deſcribed the Church at that Time to be in, to whom this Epiſtle was addreſſed.

The *Firſt* of theſe is, *Rejoicing in the Lord alway*: And, becauſe in Circumſtances ſo diſtreſſed as theirs, this might, at firſt view, look like a Duty, impracticable, and out of Time; He enforces and inſiſts upon it in the latter Clauſe of the Verſe; to ſhew, that his Command did not proceed from any Heat of inconſiderate Zeal, any want of Regard, either to the Greatneſs of their preſent Trials, or to that Infirmity of Human Nature, which is too apt to be overborne by ſuch; but that this is a Diſpoſition of Mind, which even thoſe *Trials* would very well bear, nay, which they required from them. *Again, I ſay, Rejoice.*

For a right underſtanding of this Matter, I will briefly ſpeak to the Nature of this Duty. And then ſhew, that it is both practicable, and of perpetual Obligation.

I. As to the Duty itſelf: Let it be conſider'd, that ſince Joy is a Satisfaction, reſulting from the Senſe of ſome preſent Good; *Rejoicing in the Lord* muſt needs import that Comfort and Contentment, which Holy Men have (for none but Holy Men can have it) in an Aſſurance that God is their God: that is, That they are ſuch, as he particularly loves, and favours, and will make infinitely happy in the Enjoyment of himſelf. And this is the Conſideration that Chriſtians here are commanded to take continual Delight in, even in deſpight of all thoſe Afflictions, which labour to take away or interrupt their Joy.

II. Now

II. Now that this is a Command, not at any Time, or in any Conjecture of Circumſtances, impracticable, may appear from the following Conſiderations.

1. That God, and ſuch Enjoyment of him as he reſerves for good Men, is our chief Good. And that, not only, as he is in all other Reſpects the Fulneſs of all Excellence and Perfection: but in regard his Goodneſs is unchangeable, and thoſe *whom he loves, he loves unto the End.* Although therefore to have commanded us to *rejoice always* in any Thing beſides, had been an abſurd and impracticable Command, becauſe all other Good Things are variable and fugitive, ſhort and uncertain: Yet, it is not ſo, to *rejoice always in the Lord*, becauſe he is always the ſame. A Good always preſent and always perfect: One that never leaves nor forſakes thoſe who are careful not to forſake him. And when we do ſo, the Change is not in him, but in ourſelves, who fall from our Happineſs, and forfeit our Comforts by breaking that Condition, which God, who is always conſtant to His part, hath appointed, as the only Means of entitling us to them.

2. But Afflictions are very conſiſtent with this Joy, becauſe God hath no-where declared, that theſe are certain Marks of his Diſpleaſure, or that he loves any Man the leſs for being poor, or ſick, or in pain, or ſlandered, or hated, or perſecuted. Theſe things make no neceſſary Change in our Virtue, and conſequently not in God's Love towards Us, and therefore not in our Intereſt in Him, which is the true Foundation of this Joy. So far from this, that,

3. Afflictions are often declared in Scripture, to be ſent for our Advantage, to make us better Men, to advance our Virtue and our future Happineſs, to be placed to our Account in the great Day of Reckoning, and *to work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of Glory*; *A Glory, with which the Sufferings of the preſent Time are not worthy to be compared.* And therefore the Joy men-

2 Cor. iv. 17. Rom. viii. 18.

tioned here does by no means require ſuch an abſtractedneſs of Mind, and unconcernedneſs under preſent Sufferings, as ſome Men would perſuade us Human Nature cannot come up to. It being a Principle common to all the Tranſactions of Life, to be content, and even pleaſant, under preſent Hardſhips and Sufferings, in Proſpect of a much greater Profit to be attained by them. And this is all Religion expects from us; nay, it does not expect ſo much as we daily ſubmit to for raiſing our Fortunes, or ſecuring our Eaſe in this World; Becauſe the Bliſs we aim at, as Chriſtians, is infinitely more deſirable, more diſproportionate to the utmoſt we can endure for it: And the Certainty we have of attaining it is infinitely greater. In other Caſes we go upon probable Circumſtances, and great Odds on our ſide; but here we have ſure Promiſes to depend upon, and ſuch as cannot fail us.

Setting aſide therefore the Caſe of Melancholy, and Erroneous Opinions (which are the real Cauſe of that uncomfortable State of Mind, that many People truly good appear to be under) I take the true Reaſons why we ſee no more of this Joy in the World, to be, Either Mens own Sins and Failings indulged, which muſt needs abate this Satisfaction to Them, who are ſenſible how much they have deſerved to loſe it; or elſe Mens too great Fondneſs for the World, which cannot but at once make the Senſe of preſent Sufferings more tender and afflicting; and their Deſires and Love of future Happineſs leſs eager and ſupporting. For to attain this Joy, it is neceſſary our Minds be of *David*'s Frame, when he cried out, *Whom have I in Heaven but thee? and there is none upon Earth whom I deſire in compariſon of thee?*

Pſalm xxiii. 25.

From hence the Apoſtle proceeds in the next Verſe to enjoin another Duty, wherein we are to conſider Two Things.

I. *Firſt*, The Duty itſelf. And,

II. *Se-*

II. *Secondly*, The Reaſon enforcing it.

In the Former there are Three Things to be obſerved.

1. The Nature of the Thing, *Moderation.* The Original Word ſeems primarily to import ſuch a candid Temper as diſpoſes Men to an equitable Proceeding, in Caſes, for which the Law hath not made ſufficient Proviſion. Not ſtretching things to their utmoſt Rigour, on the one hand, Not a ſupine Remiſſneſs on the Other; But receding from our Right, where it is fit, and treating Others with all that Gentleneſs and juſt Forbearance, which we, in their Caſe, would think it reaſonable to find.

2. It is order'd, *Secondly*, That this Moderation ſhould *be known*, that is, Not to reſt only in the Inward Diſpoſition, but to be manifeſted in all our Actions: And that, in ſo eminent a Degree, that it might ſerve for a particular Character to diſtinguiſh Chriſtians by.

3. It is expected, *Thirdly*, That this ſhould extend to all Occaſions, and all Manner of Perſons. For to behave one's ſelf Amicably and Meekly to thoſe, who are of the ſame Opinion, engaged in the ſame Intereſt, and ready to do the ſame by Us in return, is no great matter. But to preſerve this Evenneſs and Sweetneſs of Temper to ſuch as differ in Judgment, as uſe us ill; To return Equity for Injuſtice, Gentleneſs for Oppreſſion and Hardſhip; To put the moſt favourable Conſtructions upon the Actions of Them, who make it their Buſineſs to provoke and perſecute us; (as the *Philippians* here are exhorted to deal by their Enemies without exception, whether Ignorant, Idolatrous Gentiles, or perverſe contentious *Jews*) This is a noble Conqueſt over our Paſſions. Such, as demonſtrates the mighty Power of that Religion, which could have ſo commanding an Influence upon Human Nature, when touched in the tendereſt Part. And Nature hath need of ſome very ſtrong Motive, to check and controul thoſe Reſentments,

ſentments, which Injuries and ill Treatment are apt to ſtir in our Breaſts. Now, what that Motive is, the Latter Clauſe of the Verſe tells in thoſe Words.

The Lord is at hand. By which Some underſtand, that God is always preſent with us. A ſtrict Obſerver of our Actions; and therefore we ſhould be exceeding careful to behave ourſelves as Men ſenſible, that his Eye is always upon them: A ready Help in our Trouble, and an irreſiſtible Avenger of our Wrongs, whenever he ſees fit to reſcue us from Suffering, or to call Them to Account, by whom we ſuffer unjuſtly. But Others, more agreeably (as I preſume) to the Apoſtle's Intent, interpret this of Chriſt's coming to Judgment: The Time of which ſeems then to be believed not very far off. And, if we conſider that particular Judgment, which each of us undergoes at the Day of Death; (which determines that State of our Accounts, wherein the general Judgment will be ſure to find us.) In this Senſe, it is evident to a Demonſtration, *that the Lord is at hand*, and his coming cannot be at any great Diſtance from any Man whatſoever. The Sum then of this Matter is, That the Conſideration of a future Judgment, and the near, as well as ſure Proſpect that Chriſtians have of it, is a good Argument, why they ſhould not only bear Afflictions and Injuries with Patience; not only ſupport and delight themſelves in the Comforts of a good God and a good Conſcience, as the Verſe before directs; But (which is an Attainment ſomewhat higher ſtill) why they ſhould behave themſelves with great Temper, and all imaginable Equity, even towards thoſe Men, who are the Inſtruments and next Cauſes of their Sufferings. And the Strength of this Argument might, would the Meaſure of this Diſcourſe permit, be ſhewn to lie in theſe following Conſiderations.

1. *Firſt*, The Nature and Deſign of this Judgment: Which conſiſts in a moſt exact Enquiry after all, that paſſed in this preſent State of Trial, and a juſt Diſtribution

bution of ſuch a Recompence, as Mens Behaviour hath qualified them for. Into this Account will come all the Evil we ſuffer, as well as all the Good we do. And therefore we need not be rigorous to do ourſelves Right, ſince there is one coming, who will be ſure to right us. We need not ſcruple any Conceſſions, or Meekneſs in departing from what was our due, becauſe in the End we ſhall be no Loſers, for any ſuppoſed Advantages given us by a Principle of Humility, and Patience, and Charity: We need not puſh on that Revenge ſo haſtily, which God will inflict in his own Time, without our joining in it; and give us the Satisfaction of vindicating his Glory, and our Innocence to all the World. (This indeed is the only Conſideration, that can render the Puniſhment, even of our worſt Enemies, juſt Matter of Satisfaction to us.) We have no Reaſon to think God ſlow or negligent of our Affairs, for the Time of hearing our Cauſe is not yet. And would we have our Adverſary puniſhed before his Trial? We muſt not grow impatient at the Barbarity, or the Continuance of our Perſecutions or Afflictions; ſince the Seaſon of Retribution is not come; nay, ſince even theſe Delays will be placed to the Reckoning; ſince the longer we are tried in the Furnace, the more refined we ſhall come out from our Droſs, the brighter we ſhall ſhine; and every Thorn in our Crown ſhall be changed into a Ray of Glory. So profitable are our Pains; ſo nicely treaſured up are our Tears; ſo gainful is our Loſs; ſo ſure a Method of Exaltation is Condeſcenſion and Meekneſs; ſo firm a Security of our Right to endure wrongfully, and not inſiſt upon our Point to the utmoſt; ſo wiſe a Courſe to obtain infinitely more Good than we have deſerved, not to requite our Enemies with ſo much Ill as they have deſerved.

2. *Secondly*, The Perſon who ſhall execute this Judgment; The Lord, even *Chriſt Jeſus*. He who, as at this time, left the Glories of Heaven to put on infirm and mortal Fleſh. And can any Condeſcenſions of Ours be

compared to this? He who underwent Poverty and Contempt, Scorn and Reproach, Pain and Death; and are any Indignities, any Wrongs, any Sufferings we complain of fit to be named with theſe? He who endured all Things by free Choice; and do we fret and murmur at thoſe, which God ſends, or makes wicked Men the Executioners of upon us? He who knew no Sin; and do we complain for the Puniſhment, nay the much leſs than due Puniſhment of our Offences? He who did and ſuffered all this for his Enemies, who, in all this Diſpenſation of Meekneſs and Love, left us a Pattern that we ſhould follow his Steps; And can We diſpute the forgiving of Enemies and Injuries, after his Command and Example? He who is ſo very highly exalted, ſo gloriouſly rewarded for all his Sufferings, and who hath declared, that they who ſuffer with him, ſhall alſo reign with him; And can We doubt, that good Amends ſhall be made Us, when we ſee it made ſo amply to him already? When He is the very Perſon impowered to make it, who loved us ſo as to die for us, who declares himſelf perſecuted in his Members, who gave us theſe Commands, who ſet us this Example, who knows that we endure purely for his ſake, for the Advancement of his Honour, and in a faithful Dependence upon his Promiſes?

3. *Thirdly*, Another Conſideration, which adds weight to this Argument, is the Approach of this Day of Recompence: *The Lord is at hand.* That is, A Change there will ſoon be of their preſent State, and a Deliverance to good Men from Suffering and Perſecution. And this at leaſt is One Comfort, common to all we endure in the Body, that ſuch Evils cannot laſt always, that they may, nay quickly muſt have an End. And though even this would be but cold Comfort to Men who had no Notion of a future Being; yet to Them who conſider, that the Diſpenſations of Providence here are not final and concluſive, Who ſtedfaſtly expect another Life, for which they were principally made,

and

and wherein alone entire Happineſs is to be had, Who are taught, that the Afflictions of a Moment work out for them a Glory that ſhall be Eternal; To ſuch, I ſay, even the longeſt Term of Mortality will ſeem in compariſon as nothing, and the Burden their Maſter lays upon them, how heavy ſoever and grievous to be borne it may appear, when abſtractedly conſidered, and with regard to frail Fleſh and Blood; yet in the Account of Faith, and when taken with its Appendage of a Crown everlaſting, a Bliſs unſpeakable, a Joy that no Man takes from us, is thus but *Light*; much rather to be choſen, than all the Proſperity and Pleaſures of Sin, than all this Shadow of a World that paſſeth ſo ſwiftly away.

Another Exhortation follows; Which, though delivered in general Terms, is yet more eſpecially proper for the Time of Affliction and Perſecution. *Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by Prayer and Supplication with Thankſgiving, let your Requeſts be made known unto God.* Which Words would oblige me to obſerve Three Things. Verſe 6.

I. To enquire what Sort of Carefulneſs it is, from which the Apoſtle here diſſuades his *Philippians*, and in them all Chriſtians, under diſtreſſed Circumſtances.

II. The Remedy for Afflictions, preſcribed in the Place of their own Carefulneſs; which is, Committing Ourſelves and all Our Affairs to the Protection and Diſpoſal of God by Devout *Prayer*.

III. A neceſſary Qualification of our Prayers, even when moſt afflicted; that even then they be attended with *Thankſgiving*. But theſe Points juſtly handled would ſo far exceed the deſigned Proportions of this Diſcourſe, that I beg my Reader's Leave to refer him for Satisfaction concerning them, to the Places ſet down in the Margin.

For the Two Former ſee Goſpel for xv. Sunday after Trinity.

For the Third ſee Epiſt. for xx. Sunday after Trinity.

It only now remains, that I obſerve ſomething briefly from the laſt Verſe, and conclude this Diſcourſe.

Now

Now here, by *the Peace of God*, Some underſtand the Reconciliation made with Mankind in our Bleſſed Saviour; A Myſtery far exceeding the Comprehenſion, not of Human only, but of all created and finite Underſtandings. But the Senſe moſt appoſite to the Apoſtle's Purpoſe ſeems to be, not only that Peace, Conſidered in itſelf, but a Comfortable Senſe of, and firm Perſuaſion, that we have a Share in it; And that This will, even under the worſt Treatment, and heavieſt Afflictions, preſerve the Mind ſeriouſly affected with it, ſuch a State of undiſturbed Tranquillity as is not poſſible for any to conceive, whom their own happy Experience hath not convinced. This Senſe ſeems to be much favour'd by the juſt Importance of that Original Word, which our Tranſlators render**keep*. A Military Term, proper to Garriſons, and intimating, that this inward Peace is a ſtrong Guard, and impregnable Defence, againſt all the Tumults and Tempeſts of a boiſterous and uncertain World: Such as will neither ſuffer our Hearts to be overpower'd, that is, our Affections vitiated by immoderate Fears, or Hopes, or Deſires of Earthly Objects: nor our Minds to be captivated, that is, our Underſtanding and Judgment to be impoſed upon by falſe Notions of Temporal Good or Evil: But will ſet us above the World, and ſo ſupport and entertain us with Spiritual Conſolations, the continual Feaſt of a good Conſcience at preſent, and the Proſpect of Bliſs unſpeakable and immortal afterwards; That any Accidents here below will be incapable of getting within us, or making any diſorderly Impreſſions. But we ſhall eſteem of them, as things foreign to our true Intereſt, and look upon them with all the Indifference, which the moſt abſtracted Condition of a Soul united to the Body is capable of: Conſtantly taking Sanctuary in God, as our firm and only Hope and Stay, and uſing his Diſpenſations of every kind, as ſo many Opportunities and Inſtruments put into

* φρυρήσει.

into our Hands by Providence, to profit of, and improve our Virtue and true Happineſs by.

The only Remark I ſhall add now is, that, as this ſteady Compoſure and Serenity of Mind may be applied to all the Duties, recommended in the Epiſtle of this Day, as their Effect and Reward: So it is immediately annexed, and ſeems in a ſpecial manner to belong to that of a devout and thankful Application to God by Prayer. For Prayer is a withdrawing a Man's ſelf from the World, and coming to God; Like leaving a Clutter of Buſineſs, or breaking away from the mixt Company of People, offenſive and dangerous, or at the beſt nauſeouſly ceremonious and vain, to ſolace himſelf with One Friend alone, who is particularly dear to him. And the diligent Performance of this Duty leaves ſo ſenſible a Satisfaction behind it, gives ſuch a different Turn to the Soul, and inſpires ſuch heavenly Diſpoſitions; that the Exerciſe of the Temple, and the Retirements of the Cloſet, never go off without a grateful Reliſh and powerful Effect, except either too ſeldom, or too negligently, repeated. Moſt ſeaſonable therefore and wiſe is the Uſe, which, our excellent Mother the Church, makes of theſe Words, in diſmiſſing her Children after the moſt ſolemn Acts of Worſhip, with this Paſſage of St. *Paul*, in form of Bleſſing: Imploring, that what he foretels and promiſes here, may be good to the whole Congregation. Moſt properly, does ſhe regard the Diſtinction, generally obſerved here between the Heart and Mind, by begging that their Children and Members may be kept in the *Knowledge and Love of God*, and *of his Son Jeſus Chriſt our Lord*: And moſt reaſonably may it be expected, that this Benediction will avail; ſince the nearer we approach to God our Saviour, by a Spiritual Communion in Prayers and Sacraments, and all other Holy Ordinances, the better we ſhall know him; And the better we know him, the more we ſhall be ſure to love him. And were that Love Entire, did he but reign in,

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in, and poſſeſs our Hearts without a Rival; we ſhould then feel the beſt Senſe of that Paſſage verified to the utmoſt, in a Spiritual Regard, and in our own particular Caſe, *That the Work of Righteouſneſs is Peace, and the Effect of Righteouſneſs, Quietneſs and Aſſurance for ever.*

The GOSPEL.

PARAPHRASE.

St. John i. 19. to 29.

19. One very remarkable Teſtimony, which *John* Baptiſt gave to Jeſus, was the Anſwer he returned to a Meſſage from the Great Council of the *Jews*. The Occaſion whereof was thus: There was, at that time, an univerſal Expectation of the Meſſias appearing. Now *John*, having baptized great Multitudes of People who had reſorted to him, and thereby gained a mighty Reputation; the Sanhedrim ſent ſome Deputies, Men of Note for Knowledge and Authority, to examine, whether he was that eminent Perſon; or who he was.

19. *THIS is the record of John, when the Jews ſent Prieſts and Levites from Jeruſalem, to aſk him, Who art thou?*

20. To this he reply'd, and perſiſted in it, that He was not the Chriſt.

20. *And he confeſſed, and denied not; but confeſſed, I am not the Chriſt.*

21. Then they proceeded to enquire, whether he was *Elias* the *Tiſhbite*, whom, by a Miſconſtruction of *Malachi*'s Prophecy, Chap. iv. 5, 6. they expected perſonally to appear before the coming of the Meſſiah. To that he anſwered, that neither was he that Perſon. Again they enquire whether he were any Prophet, (as *Jeremiah* for Inſtance) who, it ſeems, ſome thought would riſe from the Dead, and appear at that time, *Matt.* xvi. 14. This he likewiſe denies.

21. *And they aſked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he ſaith, I am not. Art thou that Prophet? And he anſwered, No.*

22. After having receiv'd this Account who he was not, they deſired to be informed who he was; for that was what the Council, who delegated them, would expect to be ſatisfied in.

22. *Then ſaid they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an Anſwer to them that ſent us. What ſayeſt thou of thyſelf?*

23. *He*

23. *He ſaid, I am the Voice of one crying in the Wilderneſs, Make ſtraight the way of the Lord, as ſaid the Prophet Eſaias.*

23. To this he replies, that he was that perſon propheſied of by *Eſaias*, Chap. lx. 3.

24. *And they which were ſent were of the Phariſees.*

24. The Perſons who came upon this Enquiry were a Sect, both ſkilful in Matters of the Law, and ſo capable of judging; and particularly piqued againſt *Jeſus*, and not ſo likely to make a Report in his Favour: Upon both which Conſiderations, the Anſwer returned by them to the Sanhedrim, is of undoubted Credit.

25. *And they aſked him, and ſaid unto him, Why baptizeſt thou then, if thou be not that Chriſt, nor Elias, neither that Prophet.*

25. At laſt they came up to the Queſtion, which was chiefly aimed at all along; and that was, ſince he was not authorized by their Councils, nor yet pretended to be any ſuch eminent Perſon, whoſe extraordinary Miſſion and Character might bear him out in acting without their Appointment, how he durſt take upon him to baptize, and make Proſelytes, and that, not into the Law of *Moſes*, but after a new Faſhon.

26. *John anſwered them, ſaying, I baptize with water: but there ſtandeth one among you, whom ye know not.*

26. The Juſtification *John* made for himſelf in this Matter was, that his Baptiſm was not ſuch, as they apprehended. He made no Proſelytes to himſelf, but only prepared them to receive one, whom ſome of them might have ſeen, though they were not ſenſible of his Character.

27. *He it is, who coming after me, is preferred before me: whoſe ſhoe's latchet I am not worthy to unlooſe.*

27. But, that in Truth he was ſo far ſuperior to him in Dignity, though after him in Time, that he owned himſelf unworthy to perform the meaneſt and moſt ſervile Office about him. So far was he from preſuming to ſay, that he was either the Meſſiah, or in any degree to be compared to him.

28. *Theſe things were done in Bethabara, beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.*

28. This whole Matter was tranſacted in that Place, where the *Iſraelites* had paſſed over *Jordan* formerly, and where there

there was now a Convenience of conveying People over that River. Which occaſioning a greater Reſort, was made choice of by *John*, as a fit Place for him to preach and baptize in, and rendered what paſs'd upon this Occaſion a matter generally known.

COMMENT.

THE Paraphraſe upon theſe Words may ſuffice for an Explanation. Except in Two Points, which I ſhall endeavour to clear, and then proceed to raiſe ſome proper Inferences from them.

Now the Points I mean to inſiſt upon are,

Firſt, To reconcile the Baptiſt here denying himſelf to be *Elias*, with our Saviour expreſly affirming him to have been the *Elias that was for to come*. And,

Secondly, To explain that Preparation, which *Eſaias* propheſied ſhould be, and by the Baptiſt was actually made for the coming of the Lord.

Firſt, The Difficulty, with regard to the Former of theſe Points, lies thus: The *Jews* univerſally believed, that *Elias* ſhould appear before the Meſſiah, and that this Appearance ſhould be a certain Token and Forerunner of his Coming. This they grounded upon a Prophecy of *Malachi*; And our Lord allows the Opinion ſo far, as to anſwer his Diſciples, when objecting it, that *John* was the *Elias*, meant in that Prophet. The Queſtion here ſeems to proceed upon the general Expectation of the Meſſias about that Time. And the Baptiſt's Character was ſuch, as made ſome imagine him to be, either the Chriſt himſelf, or this eminent Forerunner of him. If then he were not the *Elias*, how comes our Lord to declare he was? If he were, how comes he in this Place to deny it? How eſpecially, ſince he might eaſily conclude, that the declaring himſelf ſo to be, would have very much diſpoſed the *Jews* to receive Chriſt, at his publick Appearance among them? For the full Reſolution of this Matter, I ſhall ſpeak to the following Particulars.

I. I ſhall

I. I ſhall conſider the Prophecy, which is the Foundation of this Opinion.

II. I ſhall obſerve the Application made of it to *John Baptiſt* by our Bleſſed Saviour.

III. I ſhall conſider the Baptiſt's Anſwer here; and ſhew the Agreement of it, both with *Malachi*'s Prediction, and our Lord's Application.

I. As to the Prophecy itſelf. This we have in Two Paſſages of *Malachi*, Ch. iii. 1. in theſe Words, *Behold I will ſend my Meſſenger, and he ſhall prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom ye ſeek ſhall ſuddenly come to this Temple.* The only Reflection I make upon this at preſent is, that by the *Lord* here, the *Jews* heretofore underſtood the Meſſias; that the *coming of that Lord to this Temple* imports his Appearance, while that Temple ſtood: And that, by the *Meſſenger to prepare his way*, is meant ſome eminent Perſon, whoſe Miniſtry, about the time of his Approach, ſhould ſet things in Order, and diſpoſe the People to give him a due Reception. Conſequently, if this Prediction have any Truth in it, it cannot mean an Advent ſtill future (as the Modern *Jews* pretend) but muſt have been accompliſh'd long ago. That is, the Meſſiah, and his Meſſenger, muſt have come, before the Razing of that Temple, the Deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*, and the Diſperſion of the *Jewiſh* Polity and People.

The Other, Chap. iv. 5, 6. runs thus: *Behold I will ſend you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful Day of the Lord. And he ſhall turn the Hearts of the Fathers to the Children, and the Hearts of the Children to their Fathers, leſt I come, and ſmite the Earth with a Curſe.* Here we have a Deſcription of the Perſon to be ſent, the Time of ſending him, the Office he was to perform, and the End that he was to ſerve by it.

1. The Perſon is called *Elijah the Prophet.* From whence the *Jews* imagined, Either that the Body of *Elijah*

Elijah was preſerv'd in Paradiſe, and ſhould again appear upon Earth, at this Seaſon appointed for it: Or that, this Body being diſſolved, God would infuſe the Spirit of *Elijah* into a new one, created for that Purpoſe: So that, Either Way, the very Perſon of *Elijah* ſhould appear before this Day of the Lord. But Chriſtian Interpreters think the Paſſage intended of One, ſo very like to *Elijah*, in Temper, in Office, and other Circumſtances; that this Reſemblance might be a ſufficient Ground for calling him by that Name. And for ſuch Figures of Speech, as we have Inſtances in Heathen Authors: So the Scriptures particularly call the Meſſias by the Name of *David*, who was a Type of him; tho' *David* had been then long dead, and there was no Expectation of his appearing again, which could countenance the interpreting that Expreſſion of his own Perſon. This is ſo reaſonable an Expoſition of *Malachi*'s Words here, that, beſides the inconteſtable Authority of our Lord, who thus explains it; we have the Confeſſion of ſome learned *Jews*, that it need not be rigorouſly confin'd to *Elias* in Perſon, but may mean ſome Other, called by his name, for the mutual and great reſemblance, which ſhould be between them.

Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24. xxxvii. 24, 25. Hoſea iii. 5.

See Pocock *on* Mal. iv. 5.

2. His Office, or the Buſineſs he ſhould come upon, is ſaid to be, *Turning the Hearts of the Fathers to*, or, (as it may rather be rendered) *with the Children*; that is, Converting all ſorts of People, Old and Young, from the Error of their ways; and promoting a General Reformation of Manners among Them, who ſhould receive his Doctrine, and be warned to eſcape the dreadful Judgments denounced by him, againſt ſuch as ſtill perſiſted in their Diſobedience.

3. To which Purpoſe we may obſerve the Time, when this eminent Perſon was to appear, to exerciſe his Miniſtry, Before *the Coming of the Great and dreadful Day of the Lord*. By which, as moſt Interpreters agree,

agree, is meant that Time, when God ſhould take Vengence upon the *Jews*, in the final Deſtruction of their City and Polity. This is particularly, called the *Day*, and the *terrible Day of* God *by Joel*, interpreted in the *New Teſtament*, by our Lord himſelf, and by St. *Peter*. The Prophetick Stile is lofty and full of Figures, and often repreſents the Overthrow of one Nation, in Terms, which, taken literally and in their utmoſt extent, import an univerſal Deſtruction of the whole World. Some indeed confine it to the Day of Judgment only. But, that the Former was (at leaſt primarily) intended by the Prophet ſeems clear from This (not to mention at preſent any other) Reaſon.

Joel. ii. Matth. xxiv. Acts. ii.

The End of this Prophet's coming is ſaid here to be the preventing or eſcaping this *great and dreadful Day*. Which agrees very well with the Prediction of Temporal Judgments, but not with that General one, at the Day of Doom. For that Day is irreverſibly fixed, the Seaſon of Mercy is then at an End, and Juſtice takes place. Reformation comes too late, when Retribution begins; And, if by the Earth we ſhould mean not only the Land of *Judea*, but all the habitable World, as ſome *Jewiſh* Writers would expound it; yet even ſo the Deſcription comes ſhort of that, which the Scriptures give us of the laſt Judgment. For then, as even the *Old Teſtament* declares, in a Senſe theſe Interpreters are obliged to ſubmit to, by this Application of *Malachi*'s Prophecy, not this lower World only, and the things contained in it, but even *all the Hoſts of Heaven ſhall be diſſolved and the Heavens themſelves rolled together as a Scroll*; When theſe, as well as the Earth, *ſhall periſh*, be ſhrivel'd and burnt up, and there ſhall be *new Heavens*, as well as a *new Earth*. From whence it will follow, that the Text before us is either meant of the Deſtruction of the

See Pocock *on* Mal. iv. *Biſhop* Kidder *Demon. Meſſias Part* ii. *Chap.* vi.

Iſai. xxxiv. 4.

Pſalm cii. 26. Iſai. lxv. 17.

Jewiſh Nation only, or at leaſt ſo meant of the laſt Judgment, as not to exclude, but imply this moſt ſignificant Type of it.

The Sum then of the Prophecy, thus explained, ſeems to be this: That, before the Deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*, there ſhould come an eminent Perſon from God, as a Meſſenger to prepare the way for the Meſſiah; That He ſhould ſo far reſemble *Elijah*, as to deſerve the ſame Name; that he ſhould be very powerful in bringing Men to Repentance; and that They, who were wrought upon by him to this purpoſe, ſhould effectually deliver themſelves, from thoſe Calamities brought upon the *Jews*, at the Time when their Temple and City were deſtroy'd. For this was that *Curſe* the Prophet had particularly in view, and threatened his People with, in caſe they continued obſtinate under the Miniſtry of this Meſſenger, and of that Lord, whoſe way he thus prepared.

II. This Interpretation will be confirmed beyond all reaſonable doubt, if we conſider the Applications of this Prophecy, made to the Baptiſt, in the New Teſtament. Of which it will ſuffice to produce Three very remarkable Inſtances.

The *Firſt* is contained in thoſe Words of the Angel, ſent to foretel his Miraculous Birth, where we have him deſcribed under theſe Characters: *He ſhall be great in the ſight of the Lord, and ſhall drink neither Wine nor ſtrong Drink; and he ſhall be filled with the Holy Ghoſt from his Mother's Womb; and many of the Children of Iſrael ſhall he turn to the Lord their God. And he ſhall go before him in the Spirit and Power of Elias, to turn the Hearts of the Fathers to (or with) the Children, and the Diſobedient to the Wiſdom of the Juſt, to make ready a People prepared for the Lord.* Here we have a great many diſtinguiſhing Marks of this excellent Perſon, which, if compared with the Hiſtory of *Elias*, will appear to be ſuch a Parallel, as might abundantly juſtify the giving that

Luke i. 15, 16, 17.

Name, to One ſo exceeding conformable to his Manners and Miniſtry. *Elias* is repreſented, as a Man, whoſe Prayers were exceeding effectual with God, and One, at whoſe Word the Heavens gave and with-held their Moiſture; which made him conſider'd as much ſuperior to thoſe who were commonly ſent by God to his People: And *John* is declared to be a *Prophet, and more than a Prophet*, ſo much more as to have it ſaid expreſly, *that among them that were born of Women there had not riſen a greater* (that is, no mere Man before the coming of Chriſt, and the Publication of his Goſpel, was worthy to be had in higher Veneration) *than John the Baptiſt*. *Elias* was a Perſon of ſingular Abſtinence and Auſterity, ſuſtained by the Cruſe of Oil, and almoſt exhauſted Barrel of Meal, of a poor Widow; much of his time was ſpent in Mountains and Deſerts, in long Faſtings, and painful Journies; He was ſuſtained by Meat, ſometimes found unexpectedly, and at other times brought him by the Fowls of the Air, ſeparated from the Converſation of the World, and diſtinguiſh'd from their Faſhions by a peculiar Habit, that carried an Air of uncommon Negligence and Mortification. And *John* was no leſs remarkable for his Solitude, and Sanctity, and rigid Abſtemiouſneſs. He continued in *the Wilderneſs till the Day of his ſhewing unto Iſrael*; and there his Clothing was exactly like that of *Elijah*, the Skins of Beaſts, *and a Leathern Girdle about his Loins, and his Meat was Locuſts and wild Honey*. Before *Elijah*'s Tranſlation, his Diſciple *Eliſha prays for a double Portion of his Spirit*, that is, ſuch an extraordinary Meaſure of the Gifts his Maſter had been endued with, as might in that reſpect confer upon him the Privilege of the Firſtborn under the Law: Which was to have twice as much in ſharing the Eſtate, as any other Child in the

Jam. v. 17, 18.
1 Kings xvii. 1.
Matth. xi. 11.
1 Kings xvii. 4, 16.
Ch. xix. 6, 7, 8.
2 Kings i. 8.
Luke i. 80.
Matth. iii. 4.
2 Kings ii. 9.
Deut. xxi. 17.

Family. And the liberal Communications of this Divine Grace to the Baptiſt, are not only intimated by thoſe Titles of Honour, by which our Saviour gives him the Preference above any other Prophet; but poſitively expreſs'd in the Angel's Account of him, by ſaying he ſhould be *filled with the Holy Ghoſt from his Mother's Womb.* Meaning, that this Gift ſhould conſtantly attend him, and ſhould be imparted, in Plenty, as great, as the Capacity of Human Nature could admit. In *Elijah*'s time the People were ſunk into Idolatry; and he ſtood almoſt alone in the Worſhip of the true God; but yet his Zeal and holy Courage was ſuch, as ſingly, and with wonderful Succeſs, to encounter the numerous Prophets of *Baal*, tho' back'd with all the Intereſt of a wicked King and Queen, and a debauch'd Court: At St. *John*'s Appearance the Corruption of Manners was no leſs general; And tho' the ſame avowing of falſe Gods did not reign then, yet the Service of the true God was ſo corrupted, as utterly to evacuate the Deſign of all Religion, by Hypocriſy and empty Forms of Godlineſs. This the Baptiſt inveighed againſt, with a Vigour and Efficacy equal to *Elias.* Such as ſpared the Vipers of that Generation as little, as the Other had done thoſe in Countenance with *Ahab*; and made a turn in the People, as ſurpriſing, as that, when *Baal*'s Prieſts were confounded, by the Teſtimony of Fire from Heaven. It were eaſy to carry this Compariſon on farther to his Reproofs of *Herod*, and the Perſecutions of his Inceſtuous Queen, anſwerable to the bold Chideings of *Ahab*, and the Malice of *Jezebel.* But the Inſtances, already inſiſted on, plainly prove him to have come in the *Spirit and Power of Elias*; And, that there might remain no Scruple, whether this were the very *Elias* of *Malachi*, the Angel here ſhuts up his Character with the very words of that Prophet, by ſaying, *He ſhall turn the Hearts of the Fathers to the Children, and the Diſobedient to the Wiſdom of the Juſt.* The Conſe-

1 Kings xviii.

Matth. iii.

quence

quence of which Converſion is, *making ready a People prepared for the Lord*, that is, fit to meet him at, or, as it is there, *to abide the Day of*, his Coming.

The *Second* Place in which we find this Prophecy applied to the Baptiſt, is the *Eleventh* of St. *Matthew*. There, upon *John*'s ſending Two of his Diſciples to *Jeſus*, in order to their receiving Satisfaction, that He was the true Meſſias, or that eminent Perſon diſtinguiſhed by the Title of *He that ſhould come*; *Jeſus*, after having diſmiſs'd them, takes occaſion to give the Multitudes a very high Character of *John*. Among other things acquainting them, V. 10. *That this was he, of whom it is written, Behold I ſend my Meſſenger before thy Face, which ſhall prepare thy way before thee.* And again, V. 14. *If ye will receive it, this is Elias which was for to come.* From this Application of *Malachi*'s Words at V. 10. it is evident, that *John* was intended by them; And from our Lord's own Words at the 14th it is no leſs evident, that the *Elias* in the *Fourth of Malachi*, is the very ſame, with the *Meſſenger ſent to prepare his way before him*, in the *Third*. Thoſe Words alſo εἰ θέλετε δέξασθαι, *if ye will receive him*, (for thus they may be rendered as well as *receive it*, neither *Him* nor *It* being in the Original) carry a very ſignificant Senſe; and ſuch, as will not ſuffer us to underſtand them of the very Perſon of *Elias*. For had the *Tiſhbite* himſelf appeared, or that Fable of a Tranſmigration of his Soul into any other been the Ground of that Perſon's being called *Elias*; Theſe were Events, that could in no degree depend upon the People's receiving, or rejecting him. But the Meaning ſeems to be, that *John* Baptiſt was the Meſſenger, ſent to perform all thoſe Offices preparatory to the coming of the Lord, which *Malachi* had foretold ſhould be done by the Prophet, upon whom that Character of *Elias* had been fixed. And this he could not do to any, but them who would receive him. For, *turning the Hearts of Fathers to the Children, and the Diſobedient to the Wiſdom of the Juſt*, was ſuch a

Change of Affections and Manners, as of Neceſſity requires a Concurrence of their own Will, who are ſo turned. Now this is the very Buſineſs, which the Perſon ſtiled *Elias* was to come about, and be diſtinguiſhed by. It was therefore very proper for our Lord, in his Diſcourſe to the Multitudes, to put in that Limitation, *If ye will receive it* or *him*; Becauſe to ſuch as were content to hearken and ſubmit to *John*'s Miniſtry, he was effectually, but to as many as would not ſuffer themſelves to be won by it, he could not poſſibly be, the promiſed *Elias*.

The *Third* and laſt Paſſage, which I ſhall mention to this Purpoſe, is that of *Matt.* xvii. 10, 11, 12, 13. For the better underſtanding whereof, we ſhall do well to obſerve, that, Some little time before our Lord had encouraged his Diſciples to Conſtancy under Afflictions, by Promiſes of a Reward and Deliverances at his coming in the *Glory of his Father*. For a farther Confirmation of this Truth, he gave a Specimen of his Glory, to Three of thoſe Diſciples, at his Transfiguration on the Mount; where they ſaw *Moſes* and *Elias* talking with him, and had a particular Revelation from Heaven, whereby Precedence was given to *Jeſus*, before thoſe Two eminent Prophets. For, at the 9th Verſe, they are commanded not to publiſh *the Viſion* (what had paſſed in the Mount) *till the Son of Man was riſen again from the Dead*. *But St. Mark* tells us, *they queſtioned among themſelves, what this riſing from the dead ſhould mean*: Which ſure they needed not to have done, if the Subject of this Diſcourſe had been nothing elſe but the Death and Reſurrection of the Son of Man. Nor could they be at a Loſs, what was meant by *riſing from the dead* in general; But the Difficulty was, how the *Meſſiah*, whom we find them upon all Occaſions hard to believe capable of dying, ſhould be concerned in any ſuch Reſurrection. And hence it is, that *Peter* could by no means perſuade himſelf,

Chap. xvi. 27.

xvii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

Mark ix. 10.

Mark xvi. 22.

himſelf, that our Lord ſhould ſuffer the Things he foretold of himſelf; as thinking this altogether inconſiſtent with that Confeſſion he had ſo lately made, and his Maſter ſo highly approved, that *Jeſus* was *the Chriſt, the Son of the living God.* This will Mark xvi. 16.
be yet more evident, if we attend to the Connexion of the following Words. For, upon mention of this *Viſion*, the Diſciples immediately aſk, *Why then ſay the Scribes that Elias muſt firſt come?* Matth. xvii. 10, 11, 12.
To which *Jeſus* anſwers, that *Elias truly ſhould firſt come, and reſtore all things.* But *I ſay unto you, that Elias is come already, and they know him not, but have done unto him whatſoever they liſted.* Now from hence it appears, that whatever the Matter of that Viſion were, or that ἔξοδος, *which Chriſt ſhould accompliſh at Jeruſalem* (as St. *Luke* phraſes it) they Luke ix. 31.
thought that it could not be accompliſhed, till after the coming of *Elias.* This Opinion was founded upon the Tradition, and unanimous Conſent of the Learned in the Law, and Expounders of Prophetick Scripture: That Tradition our Lord allows to be well-grounded, and to have had a juſt Foundation in the Words of *Malachi* particularly; Which he here, in ſhort, but comprehenſive Terms, reminds them of; and at the ſame Time, by ſaying *Elias* ſhould *come and reſtore all things*, intimates that Prophecy to be meant, not of ſuch a tranſient Appearance, as they had ſeen him make in the Mount, but of a long and laborious Courſe of Miniſtry. For by the *reſtoring all things* is implied all that Preaching of Repentance, and the Converſion of Sinners conſequent upon it, Mal. iv. 6.
which *Malachi* and the Angel in St. *Luke* Luke i. 17.
have ſet down in Terms at large. In the mean while the Queſtion ſtill remains, what notable Event that was, which the ſending of *Elias* is foretold as antecedent to. Not the Death of Chriſt certainly, for the Scribes do not ſeem to have expected, that the *Meſſiah* ſhould die at all; nor do we find any Prophecy which makes *Eli-*

jah's coming, a neceſſary Fore-runner of that *Death*. But *before the great and dreadful Day of the Lord, when he ſhould come and ſmite the Earth with a Curſe*, it is expreſly declared, he ſhould be ſent. And therefore This ſeems to have made a part at leaſt of our Lord's Diſcourſe, with *Moſes* and *Elias*. This, by what hath been ſaid, under my firſt Particular, appears very properly to be called our Lord's ἔξοδος, or finiſhing Act upon *Jeruſalem*; and the underſtanding it in this Senſe furniſhes us with a plain Account of the Diſciples Scruple, which none of the other Conſtructions, uſually put upon the Place, ſeems to do. This makes the Thread of Diſcourſe very natural and cloſe, when, upon mention of that Viſion, (and being forbidden to tell, how Chriſt would manifeſt his Glory in that remarkable Providence, till his Reſurrection had prepared Mens Minds for the Belief of his Divine Power) they immediately deſire to be ſatisfied in that difficulty, how this can be, ſince the Scribes all agreed, *that Elias muſt firſt come.*

In the mean while this is farther obſervable; That our Lord, in the Anſwer to that Enquiry, makes uſe of the very ſame Word, with that in the *Greek* of *Malachi:* That he deſcribes the Office and Errand of *Elias* in ſuch Terms, as left no manner of Doubt in them, that the Perſon propheſied of there, was not the very *Elias*, who was ſo eminent in *Ahab's* Reign; but Another, promiſed under the ſame Name and Character. And, whatever were the proper Importance of *his reſtoring all things*, (which I ſhall have occaſion to examine hereafter) they ſaw reaſon enough to conclude the thing exactly fulfilled; and diſcerned very clearly who it was, to whom thoſe Words of *Malachi* muſt needs belong, for ſo it follows, Ver. 13. *Then the Diſciples underſtood that he ſpake unto them of John the Baptiſt.*

III. The only thing remaining upon this Argument, is to enquire, how the Baptiſt's Anſwer here, which denies him to be *Elias*, agrees with *Malachi*'s Predic-

tion

tion in the *Old*, and thoſe Applications of it to him, which we have ſeen ſo fully and ſolemnly made in the *New Teſtament*. As what hath been already obſerved, may ſuffice to acquaint us, that it was the general Perſuaſion of that Age; ſo it hath been all along the prevailing Notion among the *Jews*, that *Elias* ſhould, in his own proper Perſon, come to prepare the Way for the *Meſſias*. Now the World being at that Time big with Expectations of the *Meſſiah*, and *John* exerciſing his Miniſtry of Repentance, after an unuſual Method and with great Authority; the great Council at *Jeruſalem* ſend to enquire, whether he were either the *Chriſt*, or *Elias* now return'd from Heaven, as they imagined he was to do upon Chriſt's Appearance. To this their Senſe of the Queſtion, he replies in expreſs Terms, that he was neither the One, nor the Other. Which yet does not hinder his being, nor at all interfere with our Lord's affirming him to be, the Perſon foretold under the Name and Character of *Elias*, in the true Signification of *Malachi*'s Prophecy; though he were not the very *Elias*, who had lived in King *Ahab*'s Time, of whoſe Second Coming into the World the Sanhedrim now enquired, according to their miſtaken Conſtruction of that Prophecy.

But ſtill it may be urged, that, in Reaſon and Charity, this Matter ought at leaſt to have been more fully explained, and thoſe *Jews* not left thus in the dark, in a Queſtion of ſuch Importance: Since the Setting them right in the meaning of *Malachi*'s Prediction, would, in all likelihood, have proved a very powerful Inducement, to their believing that *Jeſus* was the *Chriſt*. I anſwer, that This was ſufficiently done in thoſe Words at V. 23. Where to that Query, *Who art thou that we may give an Anſwer to them that ſent us? What ſayeſt thou of thyſelf? He ſaid, I am the Voice of one crying in the Wilderneſs, make ſtraight the way of the Lord, as ſaid the Prophet Eſaias.* For the clearing this Point, we

are

are to obſerve, that the *Jews*, beſides their Scriptures, ſeem to have had conſtant authentick Traditions; whereby the darker Paſſages of the Prophetick Writings, (ſeveral of thoſe eſpecially which relate to the Times of the Meſſias) were interpreted. This Conſideration is of great weight, in the Matter now before us. For, as the *Elias*, in *Malachi* iv. appears to be the very ſame with the Meſſenger ſent before his Face, Ch. iii. 1. by our Lord's applying thoſe Two Scriptures together to the Baptiſt: So *Malachi*'s Meſſenger, and *Eſaiah's Voice of one crying in the Wilderneſs*, appear no leſs evidently to be meant of the ſame Perſon, by St. *Mark*'s Application of both to the ſame Baptiſt. The very firſt Period of his Book runs thus, *The beginning of the Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt, the Son of God, As it is written in the Prophets, Behold I ſend my Meſſenger before thy Face, which ſhall prepare thy way before thee. The Voice of one crying in the Wilderneſs, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths ſtraight. John did baptize in the Wilderneſs, and preach the Baptiſt of Repentance for remiſſion of Sins.* To ſupport this Argument, I need not inſiſt upon the Divine Aſſiſtance and Inſpiration; but would only aſk, that St. *Mark* may be allow'd to have common Senſe. For it would plainly argue a Man forſaken even of That, to lay the very Foundation of his Book, in Two Prophecies joined together, whoſe Agreement in the ſame Object was diſputed. Eſpecially, where there were ſo many Enemies, who wanted neither Inclination nor Skill, to confute and put him to Shame in any Miſconſtructions of this kind. If then (to return to the Matter in hand) If that Prophecy of *Eſaias* did, and were acknowledg'd to point, at the ſame Perſon with the other in *Malachi*; It follows that the Baptiſt, by returning Anſwer to thoſe great Oracles in the *Sanhedrim*, that he was *Iſaiah*'s Voice crying in the Wilderneſs, did, in Effect, and by neceſſary Con-

See Judgment of the Jewiſh Church againſt the Unitar. Chap. ii.

Matth. xi. 10, 14.

Mark i. 1, 2 3, 4.

Conſequence, affirm himſelf to be *Malachi*'s *Elias*, though not that *Elias*, whom they erroneouſly expected. And thus St. *John*'s Anſwer to the *Jews*, is ſo far from contradicting what our Lord aſſerts concerning him, however in Words there may ſeem ſome Inconſiſtence, that it is in Truth the very ſame Thing; The Perſons in *Eſaias* and *Malachi* the ſame, and the Buſineſs they came about the ſame. All which appear more plainly, if we now, in the

Second Place, conſider the Preparation, which it was foretold this Perſon ſhould make, and how that Prediction was actually fulfilled in *John Baptiſt*. Would the Meaſure of this Diſcourſe allow it, yet to enlarge upon this Head now were leſs Proper, than to defer that to another Occaſion, which will offer itſelf hereafter. All therefore needful to be done at preſent is only to conſider the Importance of thoſe Phraſes, whereby the Prophets foretold this Perſon and his Office, and briefly to obſerve what Completion they found, in his Execution of it. *St.* John Baptiſt's *Day.*

The Paſſage in *Iſaiah* manifeſtly alludes to Harbingers, and ſuch other Officers, as upon the Journies of Princes were employed to take care, that the ways ſhould be levell'd and put in Order, and all ſuch Obſtructions removed, as might obſtruct their Paſſage, or render it leſs eaſy and commodious. Thus upon the King of Glory's Approach, the Preaching and Baptiſm of *John* put Mankind into a Poſture of receiving him, and greatly facilitated the Deſign of his Coming; by bringing them to a due Senſe of their Sins; by diſabuſing them, with regard to thoſe Advantages they vainly flattered themſelves in, upon the Account of a carnal Deſcent from *Abraham*, or the ſuperſtitious Obſervance of a ritual Law: by foretelling the dreadful Effects of God's Anger, upon All, who did not apply themſelves to true Holineſs, and bring forth Fruits worthy of Repentance. And, in regard Baptiſm was always look'd upon to be a very ſignificant and ſolemn thing, an Engagement to

Duty,

Duty, and an entering into Covenant with God; This, when adminiſtered by *John*, to Perſons already under the Obligation of the Law, ſhewed, that, as the *Jews* uſed to receive their Proſelytes in this Manner, ſo the Perſons baptized by *John*, did alſo undertake ſome new Conditions, and indent for ſome Privileges, which they did not underſtand themſelves to be comprehended in before. Thus did he baptize them with a *Baptiſm of Repentance*, to become effectual for the Remiſſion of Sins; By the Faith and Obedience of him, whom he then ſhew'd them perſonally as the *Lamb of God that taketh away the Sin of the World*; And by making that Belief and Obedience the Sole Condition of being pardoned and accepted. Upon theſe Accounts he is properly ſaid to prepare the Way of the Lord, and to reſtore, or, as ſome underſtand the Word, ἀποκαλάσ-ήσει, *to finiſh* and *perfect* all Things; Not only reducing them into due Order for the Meſſiah's Approach, but putting an End to the Old, and making an Entrance for them into the New, Diſpenſation. In which Senſe Many have underſtood thoſe Words, *that the Law and the Prophets propheſied until John*; and That Alluſion of the Fathers, who repreſent the Baptiſt, as a ſort of middle Partition between the Law and the Goſpel. Of the Law, as a thing paſt, and now come to a Period; of the Goſpel, as commencing under Him, who was then actually preſent in Perſon, and, with regard to his Offices, juſt then about to be manifeſted among them. And therefore, ſince no part of *John*'s Doctrine terminated in himſelf; and ſince his Baptiſm referr'd them to Chriſt for Acceptance and Salvation, he is moſt properly ſaid *to prepare his way* by his Miniſtry. But this he alſo did, in a more remote and obſcure Senſe, by ſeveral other Circumſtances, relating to his own Perſon and Behaviour, which were eminent Figures of *Jeſus Chriſt*, and ſhall (by God's Aſſiſtance) be taken into particular Conſideration hereafter.

Matth. xi. 13.

In

In the mean while, I ſhall conclude my preſent Diſcourſe with a few practical Reflections, ariſing from the Portion of Scripture before us, and ſuitable to that Seaſon, for which the Church hath here recommended it, as a proper Subject of every Chriſtian's Meditation.

1. St. *John*, in the Place now under Conſideration, hath ſet us an excellent Pattern of true Humility. The Queſtions, regarding thoſe Notions of the Phariſees, which would have tended to advance him in Honour and Eſteem with the People, he returns Anſwer to, in Negatives ſo direct and plain, as would admit of no Ambiguity, no Doubt at all. Thoſe, which concern his true Character, he is content with ſuch Replies to, as refer to a paſt Prophecy concerning himſelf, and leave Them to draw the Conſequences ariſing from it. The Teſtimony borne to our bleſſed Lord, is conceived in Terms ſo reſpectful and magnificent, as would not give the leaſt Encouragement, for the moſt zealous of his Admirers, to draw any Compariſon between *Jeſus* and Him. Thus what might tend to remove all Opinions of his being greater than in Truth he was, is induſtriouſly contriv'd, to undeceive his moſt partial Followers; What was ſtrictly his Right, is very ſparingly and modeſtly delivered; And that, which imports the Preference due to that eminent Perſon, whoſe Forerunner he was, declares a Diſtance as great, a Reverence as profound, as Words could poſſibly expreſs. How different a Conduct is this now, from that, which the generality, even of Them, that would appear free from Vanity and Preſumption, are uſed to exerciſe upon the like Occaſions? How well content are ſuch to let the World go on, in thoſe Miſtakes concerning them, which make for their own Advantage? How willing to appear in a falſe Light, at leaſt to excuſe themſelves from ſetting their own Characters in a true One, by leſſening that Eſteem, which comes from Other Men thinking more highly of them, than they ought to think? How does This reproach all that laboured

laboured Artifice of a diſſembled Humility, which renders a wilful depreciating of one's own Worth, only a nicer way of commending and exalting it? which holds faſt with one Hand what it would ſeem to give up with the other, and, by an Affectation of Modeſty, contrives to be more ſucceſsfully Arrogant and vain; The glorious Things ſpoken of *John* elſewhere, he might, without any Breach of Truth, have declared to thoſe *Jews* of himſelf; but That eminent Meſſenger, ſent to prepare the Way of the Lord, That figurative *Elias*, who came in the Spirit and Power of the *Tiſhbite*, That *Prophet and more than a Prophet*, That excellent Perſon, than whom *there had not riſen a greater among them that are born of Women*, deſcribes himſelf only in that of a *Voice crying in the Wilderneſs*; the loweſt of all the *Characters*, which the Ancient Prophets had repreſented him by.

Thus have we, in the Baptiſt, a ſecond Inſtance of Humility; which, when unfeigned, is by no means jealous of its utmoſt Right; but ſo far from invading what belongs not to it, that it does not claim, nor is tenacious of its own: is well ſatisfied to appear in its meaneſt Figure, and even glad to ſeem little in the Eyes of the World, that it may be greater in the Eyes of God. But eſpecially it is never eager to magnify itſelf; chuſing rather to win Eſteem by Modeſty and Good Works, than to lay Claim to it, by an anxious and unſeemly publiſhing of its own Qualifications and Deſerts: Highly contented to become an Inſtrument of God's Glory, and the Good of Men, even in the meaneſt Capacity; and accounting it no Shame, to have Others thought better than One's ſelf.

Which leads me to a *Third*, and that the higheſt Inſtance of the Baptiſt's Humility, expreſs'd in thoſe Words, *I baptize with Water, but there ſtandeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me, is preferred before me, whoſe ſhoes latchet I am not worthy to unlooſe.* Emulation and Envy

Ver. 26, 27.

Envy are inſeparable Attendants upon Pride; And They who can be content with Equals, often find it hard to acknowledge, and harder yet to rejoice in, the Excellencies of Others, ſuperior to their own. But here we find the Baptiſt, upon all Occaſions, not only depreſſing his own Worth, but induſtriouſly extolling, and declaring a mighty Satisfaction in, thoſe more liberal Communications of the Holy Spirit to *Jeſus*, which gave him incomparably the Preference above himſelf. And this is a noble Pitch of Humility; when we, after his Example, can ſee, and be juſt to, and ſincerely congratulate the Merits and diſtinguiſhing Abilities of our Brethren, without thinking our own at all diſparaged, or taking leſs Comfort in them, by their being more Happy, and in more Eſteem, than ourſelves. This is therefore deſcribed, as one of the Characters of Charity, that it does not only not *vaunt itſelf, but not envy others.* The eminent Perſon now before us hath left us a Pattern of Virtue, conſpicuous in no one Inſtance more, becauſe perhaps in none more ſeldom imitated, than in thoſe frank Confeſſions to his own Diſciples, who moſt unlike their Maſter in this Point, could ſo ill brook a Rival of his Honour: *He muſt increaſe, but I muſt decreaſe. He that hath the Bride, is the Bridegroom, but the Friend of the Bridegroom which ſtandeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly becauſe of the Bridegrooom's Voice. This my Joy therefore is fulfilled. He that cometh from above, is above all.* And again, To ſhew the Vaſtneſs of the Diſtance, and how Impious it was, even to admit of any Compariſon between them, (in the Words now under Conſideration,) *He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whoſe ſhoes latchet I am not worthy to unlooſe.* And this was a Qualification, very neceſſary to be inſiſted upon. For, till we have ſubdued this Spirit of Emulation, and brought our Minds to be content with being excelled by others, to be thankful for God's making them greater Inſtruments

1 Cor. xiii. 4.

John iii. 29, 30, 31.

ments of his Glory, and to do Right to their Abilities for this Purpoſe, to rejoice in the Honour They acquire, by them, and not to think our Worth eclipſed by Their brighter Luſtre; We do but flatter ourſelves with a diſſembled Pride, and are not yet come up to that Pitch of true Humility, of which this Day's Goſpel propoſes the Baptiſt for our Pattern.

2. *Secondly*, Theſe Words of St. *John*, laſt inſiſted upon, deſerve to be very ſeriouſly conſidered, becauſe they ſeem to contain a clear Intimation of our Bleſſed Lord's Divine Nature and Excellencies. For, what Excellencies, leſs than Divine, could juſtify that awful Diſtance they expreſs, between ſo eminent a Perſon, and the Holy Jeſus? They are not Words of Compliment and Form, but of ſtrict Truth and Equity. And yet it will be very hard to underſtand them ſo, if the Compariſon be ſtated, only between One Prophet and Another, only between the Prince and ſo venerable a Harbinger: In ſhort, if we underſtand Them any otherwiſe, than Thus, that even He that *was more than a Prophet*, and than whom there had not riſen a greater ever born of Women, was notwithſtanding ſo many Degrees inferior to Him, whoſe Way he came to prepare, becauſe he was ſo the Son of a Woman, as to be more than Man: The Son of God, and himſelf very God. And thus conſidered, the Paſſage now before us, is ſo far from an affected Strain of depreſſing himſelf, and magnifying his Maſter; that, could St. *John* have found any Terms yet more lowly, they were ſtill all far leſs than were due to that Infinite Diſtance, that Eſſential Greatneſs, between which, and the moſt exalted of all its Creatures, there is no Compariſon, nay not any manner of Proportion, to found a Compariſon upon.

Matth. xi. 9, 11.

3. But then the greater Obligation have we, *Thirdly*, to uſe all poſſible Endeavours, for diſpoſing our Souls to the Virtue I have been enforcing. For, if a Perſon ſo highly favoured, ſo magnificently ſpoken of as the Baptiſt,

tiſt, were not worthy to ſerve this Lord in the meaneſt Capacity; how low an Opinion ought We to conceive of ourſelves, whoſe Sanctity and Graces fall ſo very much beneath this bright Example? How great is the Honour of being admitted to ſerve him? How mighty the Condeſcenſion of accepting, and rewarding, thoſe poor Expreſſions of the Homage due to his Majeſty, from weak and frail Mortals, and (which does moſt of all depretiate our Services) from vile polluted Sinners? How ſeaſonably is this Pattern of Humility recommended to our Thoughts and Imitation? How powerfully ought it to influence our Souls, Now eſpecially, when the approaching Feſtival calls upon us, to commemorate an Inſtance of it, ſo much more aſtoniſhing; If the Pattern ſet us by *John*, ſhould move, behold a greater than *John* is here. For God himſelf deſcends from Heaven; He does not diſdain the Womb of a Virgin, the Miſeries, Infirmities and Sufferings of Human Fleſh: He exhibits himſelf to us in the Form of a gentle Babe, in the Circumſtances of a Birth void of Worldly Pomp; not in Swadling Cloaths only, but in a Manger too; With all the Marks of Poverty and Neglect; He vouchſafes not only to be Man, but to appear the laſt and loweſt of Men: And He, whoſe Shoes the pureſt Spirit, and the Perſon exalted above the higheſt Prophets, was not worthy to unlooſe, does, if I may ſo ſay, ſtoop down to unlooſe the Latchet of the meaneſt of his Servants, *Lord, what is Man that thou ſhouldeſt thus conſider him, or the Son of Man, that thou ſhouldeſt with ſuch amazing Humility viſit him?* But, Lord, what are We, if this myſterious Condeſcenſion do not excite our Wonder, do not provoke our Imitation? And how abſurdly do we celebrate the ineſtimable Bleſſing of God manifeſted in the Fleſh, if our Hearts be not prepared with that humble Diſpoſition, which is ſo frequently inculcated in thy Goſpel, which was ſo particularly conſpicuous in thy Nativity, and to the inimitable Perfection whereof, we owe all the great Things thou

wert pleaſed to do, and all the bitter Things thou wert content to ſuffer, for the Redemption of thy own wretched Creatures? O come then now into our Souls, as thou didſt heretofore into our Fleſh! Make us like Thee, as thou wert made like Us; like Thee in abaſing Ourſelves here, that we may, like Thee, be highly exalted hereafter.

The Nativity of our Lord, or Birth-Day of CHRIST, commonly called Chriſtmas-Day.

The COLLECT.

ALmighty God, who * haſt given us thy only begotten Son to take our Nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of † a pure Virgin; Grant that we being ‡ regenerate, and made thy Children by adoption and grace, may daily be ‖ renewed by thy Holy Spirit, through the ſame our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who liveth and reigneth with thee, and the ſame Spirit, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

* John i. 14. iii. 16.
† Luke i. 27. Matth. i. 25.
‡ John i. 12, 13. Rom. viii. 15.
‖ Tit. iii. 5.

The EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE.

Heb. Chap. i.

1. God, who never ſuffered Mankind to be left without all Knowledge

1. *GOD, who at ſundry times, and in divers manners, ſpake in time paſt unto the Fathers by the Prophets,*

of himſelf and his Will, hath yet diſtributed that Knowledge, in ſuch different Methods and Proportions as he ſaw fit. To the *Jews* particularly, and their Anceſtors, he revealed his Will by Prophets; but this was done by Piecemeals and Parcels; and to them he diſcovered himſelf in Viſions, Clouds, Dreams, Figures, and great Variety of Inſpirations.

2. This was the Condition of former Ages, and of that imperfect Diſpenſa-

2. *Hath in theſe laſt days ſpoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom alſo he made the worlds.*

tion;

tion; but the Gospel, which is the last Men are to expect, gives us a full Declaration of his Will; and excels the rest infinitely, upon the Account of that Hand which brings it to us. For this is no less a Person than his own Divine Son, to whom he hath given an universal Dominion over all his Creatures. Nor is it strange that they should all be subjected to this God-man; since He, as God, was the Lord and Creator of them all; equal in Power to his Father.

3. *Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

3. Of the same Divine Majesty and Substance, a Beam of the same Light, an exact Resemblance of his Original Perfections. For whatever Excellencies are in the Father, the same are in the Son, and by him they are reflected down upon Mankind. As he did with the Father create, so does he with him preserve and govern, all things by the same Almighty Power. And therefore, when this Divine Person had condescended to become Man, and expiate for our Offences by the Sacrifice of himself, God exalted his Human Nature to his Throne, and gave him an unlimited Dominion.

4. *Being made so much better than the Angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.*

4. Preferring him as far above the most glorious Spirits the Angels, as his Divine Original had set him above them before; as a Creator is above Creatures, a King above Subjects, a Son above Servants.

5. *For unto which of the Angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, This day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son.*

5. This is very manifest, from the different Manner of Expression used in Scripture, with regard to Him and Them. For those Passages, which concern'd Christ, were never meant of any Angels. Nor does God call Them Sons begotten of him, or declare himself their Father, in that strict Signification peculiar to this Son, who was begotten from all Eternity, and declared of the same Divine Excellencies with the Father, by his Resurrection from the Dead.

6. *And again, when he bringeth the first begotten into the World, he saith, And let all the Angels of God worship him.*

6. Likewise another Psalm, relating to this Heir's Investiture in his Kingdom, is so far from equalling the Angels to him, that it commands them to do him Homage, and pay him the humblest Adoration.

7. Thoſe Bleſſed Spirits are always mentioned in the Capacity of Servants; And the Efficacy of their Miniſtry, as well as the Activity of their Nature, is deſcribed by comparing them to other Creatures; ſuch as Winds, and Fire;

7. *And of the Angels he ſaith, Who maketh his Angels ſpirits, and his Miniſters a flame of Fire.*

8, 9. But the Son is mentioned as a King ſeated upon an eternal Throne; and exalted far above any Creature whatſoever, as a Reward for the Juſtice of his Adminiſtration; Nay he is addreſſed to as God, of the ſame incomprehenſible Perfections, and One with that Father, who hath thus dignified his Human Nature: For,

8. *But unto the Son he ſaith, Thy Throne, O God, is for ever and ever, a Scepter of righteouſneſs is the Scepter of thy Kingdom.*

9. *Thou haſt loved righteouſneſs and hated iniquity, therefore God, even thy God, hath annointed thee with the oyl of gladneſs above thy fellows.*

10, 11, 12. It is alſo obſervable, that another Pſalm attributes to the Son the Creation of Heaven and Earth; Which of neceſſity ſuppoſes him to be very God, and to have been before the things created by him. As is farther manifeſt, by the ſame Paſſage taking notice, that theſe Creatures are ſubject to Change and Decay, and that They ſhall actually be by his Almighty Power one Day demoliſhed; Laid aſide like a Garment; put off to be worn no more; whereas his Kingdom and Nature are acknowledg'd to be eternal and immutable.

10. *And Thou, Lord, in the beginning haſt laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands.*

11. *They ſhall periſh, but thou remaineſt: and they all ſhall wax old as doth a garment,*

12. *And as a veſture ſhalt thou fold them up, and they ſhall be changed; but thou art the ſame, and thy years ſhall not fail.*

COMMENT.

THE Author of this Epiſtle doth, in this and ſome following Chapters, plainly make it his Buſineſs, to prove the juſt Pre-eminence of the Chriſtian Diſpenſation, above any other which had been then, I may add, or ſhould at any time afterwards obtain, in the World. Which Deſign he purſues, as upon ſundry other Arguments, not falling properly under our preſent Conſideration;

ſideration; ſo in the Paſſage now before us, eſpecially from Two, which I ſhall make the Subject of this Diſcourſe upon it.

I. The *Firſt* is, The Perfection of this above any Other Revelation of the Divine Will to Mankind.

II. The *Second* is, The Excellence of that Perſon, by whom this Revelation was imparted. Upon Each of which, when I ſhall have ſo far enlarged, as is neceſſary for a due Explanation of the Point; it ſhall be my endeavour to leave them both upon my Reader's Mind, with ſuch Applications, as are ſuitable to the Matter in hand, and to the Solemnity of this important Feſtival.

I. I begin with the Perfection of the Chriſtian Revelation, above any Other afforded to Mankind. And here we may obſerve,

1. *Firſt* of all, That the Condition of the greateſt part of the World, before the coming of our Bleſſed Saviour, was ſuch, as would admit of no manner of Compariſon, with the Advantages that followed after it. Of Them it is, that St. *Paul* ſpeaks, when, in his Apology to the *Athenians*, he calls the Ages before Chriſt, *the Times of Ignorance*; and when obſerving to the Men of *Lyſtra*, That *God in times paſt ſuffered all Nations to walk in their own ways*, allowing little other Knowledge of himſelf, than what muſt be the natural Reſult of that regular Providence, which ſuſtains and governs the World. For ſo he goes on there, *Nevertheleſs he left not himſelf without Witneſs, in that he did good, and gave us Rain from Heaven, and fruitful Seaſons, filling our Hearts with Food and Gladneſs.* And how few would They be, who wiſely conſidered and improved thoſe gracious Diſtributions, as they might have done? Nay, how poor and defective would that Knowledge and Service of God be, which, even by Them, who made the utmoſt Improvement thoſe

Acts xvii. 30. xiv. 16.

Verſe 17.

Events were capable of, could poſſibly be attain'd; if compar'd with the Diſcoveries God made of his Nature and Will, by expreſs Revelation and Rules of Living? So juſt Reaſon had the Pſalmiſt to glory in the diſtinguiſhing Kindneſs of Almighty God to his favourite People; *He ſheweth his Word unto Jacob, his Statutes and his Judgments unto Iſrael; he hath not dealt ſo with any Nation, and as for his Judgments, they have not known them.*

Pſal. cxlvii. 19, 20.

When therefore this Epiſtle begins with a Compariſon between the *Jewiſh* and the *Chriſtian* Revelation; we may very well underſtand the Reaſon of doing ſo to be, not only, becauſe the Perſons, immediately addreſs'd to, were concern'd in the Former of thoſe Revelations; but becauſe the Circumſtances of no other People but Them, could pretend to rival, could indeed be worthy, ſo much as to be named with, Ours upon this Account. And therefore, to ſhew the Chriſtian's Advantage confeſſedly above that of all Mankind, in Point of Divine Light and Knowledge, no more was neceſſary, than to prove it ſuperior to any, in Times paſt, afforded to the *Jews*. And how far it was ſo, beſides what will come under Obſervation, when my Second Particular ſhall be treated of, we have fair Intimation given us in theſe *Two Reſpects*.

1. The Methods, by which ſuch Knowledge was communicated heretofore, Ver. 1.

2. The Title given to the Chriſtian Diſpenſation when calling it *the laſt Days*, Ver. 2.

1. The *Firſt* Difference between theſe Two Diſpenſations taken notice of to our Advantage, is contain'd in thoſe Words, *at ſundry times*, and *in divers manners*. For thus *God's ſpeaking to the Fathers* of theſe *Hebrews by the Prophets* is deſcribed, Ver 1. Now, though our Reading give the Truth and remote Senſe of the Text, yet the Word rendered *ſundry times*, does more immediately, and properly import by *ſeveral parcels*. So then the Intent of the Place is, that

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that the Knowledge of God, and of his good Pleaſure, was dealt out to the *Iſraelites* in diſtinct Portions; And that with ſuch Frugality (if I may have leave ſo to ſpeak) as conſtantly to have ſome Reſerve of freſh Diſcoveries for ſucceeding Ages, which thoſe that went before had lived in Ignorance of.

To make this plain, we need no other Inſtance, than That, which was in Truth the End and Aim, not only of the Law, but of all the Diſpenſations from the beginning of the World: The Redemption, I mean, of Mankind, by Chriſt the Bleſſed. Obſerve then the gradual Notices of Him, and the Characters, by which he ſhould be diſtinguiſhed at his Coming. To *Adam* and *Eve* we find him promiſed in general, * as a *Man*; To *Abraham*, † as his Poſterity; To *Jacob*, as deſcending from the Tribe of ‖ *Judah* in particular; To *David*, it was revealed that he ſhould be of his Family, and the ‡ *Fruit of his Body*; To *Micah*, that he ſhould be born * in *Bethlehem*; to *Iſaiah*, that his Birth ſhould be miraculous, and his † Mother a Virgin; To the ſame Prophet, the End ‖ and beneficial Effects of his Death; To *Daniel*, not theſe only, but the preciſe Time of his Suffering; To *Haggai*, (Laſtly) and *Zechariah*, and *Malachi*, that all theſe Events ſhould be * accompliſhed, before the Deſtruction of the Second Temple. Now not to mention any more, if we compute the Seaſons of theſe few; The general Prediction of a Saviour in Human Nature, will be found to bear Date before that of his being *Abraham*'s Seed, about Two thouſand and fourſcore Years; From This to the Declaration of his particular Tribe, were Two hundred and fourſcore Years; Thence to the Prophecy of his particular Family, above Six hundred Years; After that, to the Signification of the Manner and Place of his miraculous Nativity, more than Three hundred Years; And, *Laſtly*, That of his Appearance and

* Gen. iii. 15.
† Gen. xvii. xxii. 18.
‖ Gen. xlix. 10.
‡ Pſal. cxxxii.
* Mic. v. 2.
† Iſai. vii. 10, &c.
‖ Iſai. liii. Dan. ix.
* Hag. ii. Zech. xiv. Mal. iii. iv.

Death, not long before the Deſtruction of the Second Temple, (foretold by *Daniel* and the reſt after the Captivity) muſt have followed all the forenamed Prophecies, at the Diſtance of Three hundred and fifty Years, or thereabouts. Now every one of theſe ſtruck more and more Light into this moſt important Myſtery; and by the ſame Proportions, confirmed Mens Minds in the Expectation of a Saviour, and gave the Marks, by which they might know him from any falſe Pretender to that Character. By ſo gentle, ſo ſlow degrees, was the Dawning of thoſe Ages brought forward. A Dawning of Three Thouſand and almoſt ſix hundred Years; And, even at the Determination of this long Period, nay, and four hundred Years after that, it was no better than a Dawning ſtill. For all this while, the Sun of Righteouſneſs darted his riſing Beams, through a Cloud of Types and Ceremonies; and did not ſhine in broad and perfect Day, till the Shadows and Figures of the Levitical Inſtitution gave Place to the Simplicity of that better Service, which taught Men to *worſhip God in Spirit and in Truth*. And in this regard too the Progreſs was gradual. For, as the Fulneſs of Time drew nearer, the Duties of the Moral Law were more diligently inculcated, and the Subſtance and Spiritual Meaning of the Ceremonies more fully explained. So that herein conſiſted a great part of the Prophetick Office, to correct the groſſneſs of Superſtitious and carnal Minds, who looked no deeper than the outward Ordinance; and, laying all the Streſs there, never anſwered the Intent of thoſe Commands, which they all the while vainly imagined themſelves the moſt punctual Performers of.

Again, As the Meaſure, ſo likewiſe the Way, in which God diſcovered himſelf heretofore, is very different from that made uſe of under the Goſpel. For this was the Apoſtle's Meaning, when ſaying, that this was done *in times paſt*, as *at ſundry times*, ſo *in divers manners* too. Whereby we have reaſon to believe, he had

had regard to the Dreams, the Viſions, the Voices, the Thunders, the Appearances of Angels, the bright Clouds, the Mercy-Seat, and the many other Circumſtances, which the Hiſtory of the Old Teſtament relates the Revelations of thoſe Times to have been attended with. And beſides theſe, the dark Parables, the intricate Figures, the ſudden Raptures, the Extaſies, the general Diſorder of Nature, and the ſealing up of the Senſes, of which *Abraham*, and *Samuel*, and *Jeremiah*, and *Daniel*, and ſundry others, are famous Inſtances, I might ſay, All the other Prophets, One excepted: For * ſo that Paſſage of God's *talking with Moſes Face to Face, as a Man talketh with his Friend*, is generally underſtood; that He alone, of all Mankind, was not ſubject to the Conſternations, and violent Impreſſions, uſual upon ſuch Occaſions. So that, be the particular Form of the Revelation what it would, ſtill every ſort affected the Party receiving it, with ſome very remarkable Alteration, both in Body and Mind.

* Numb. xii. 8.

2. Now the manifeſt Advantage of the *Chriſtian* above theſe antecedent Diſpenſations muſt, according to the Force of the foregoing Argument, conſiſt in the Fulneſs of the Diſcovery, and in the free and familiar Manner of imparting it. Both which I take to be intimated here, in that very ſignificant Title, given to the Goſpel Age, when called by the Apoſtle *theſe laſt Days*. They, who are at all acquainted with the *Jewiſh* Forms of Speech, know very well, that no Expreſſions are more frequent with them, than the *latter Days*, *the laſt Times*, *the World to come*, and the like: And, that their Interpreters do generally underſtand the Scriptures, where *ſuch Expreſſions occur, of the Coming and Kingdom of the Meſſiah. The Reaſon is, becauſe they look'd upon this, as the great Revolution, which ſhould continue for ever unchangeable. That wherein all their Hopes and Expec-

*So Gen. xlix. 1. Numb. xxiv. 14. Iſa. ii. 2. Mic. iv. 1. Dan. ii. 28.

Expectations ought to center, as the Completion of all the Deſigns of Providence. And thus the ſeveral States, whether of their own Nation and Church in particular, or of Mankind in general, were not only antecedent, but even ſubordinate, to it. The Happineſs of that Time, as it is frequently ſet forth, by other Marks of Peace, and Plenty, and all manner of Worldly Affluence and Succeſs; ſo it is particularly extolled, for the Perfection of thoſe Spiritual Advantages, then to be moſt liberally communicated to the World. Then it was, that no Man ſhould need * to *teach his Neighbour or his Brother*, for they ſhould *all be taught of God*, and *every one ſhould know him from the leaſt unto the greateſt*; Then, that *the Mountain † of the Lord's Houſe ſhall be eſtabliſhed upon the Top of the Mountains, and all Nations ſhould flow into it*; Then, that *the Earth ſhould be filled with the Knowledge* * *of the Glory of the Lord, as the Waters cover the Sea.* All which, and other glorious Characters, as we ſee in part brought to paſs long ago, by enlarging the *Meſſiah*'s Dominion, over the many and diſtant Countries, where his Doctrine hath been received: So have we reaſon to embrace thoſe Gradual Advances of his Kingdom in Mens Hearts, as ſo many Earneſts and undoubted Pledges, of that abſolute and unbounded Conqueſt he ſhall make over Ignorance and Error, when the Seaſon of exerting his Grace more plentifully ſhall come and effectually prepare, as well as proclaim, the nearer Approaches of his Kingdom of Glory. And, though this Seaſon be one of thoſe, which the *Father hath put in his own Power*; yet be the Diſtance from us what it will, it is ſufficient, that theſe are all the *Days of the Meſſiah*, to denominate them *the laſt Days*. That Phraſe by no means neceſſarily importing the ſpeedy End of this Material World; but only, that how long ſoever God ſhall ſuffer it to endure, he hath no ſubſequent Diſpenſation

* Iſa. liv. 14. Jer. xxxi. 44. † Iſa. ii. 2. Mic. iv. 4.

* Heb. ii. 14.

ſation in reſerve. In a Word, He hath fixed the Chriſtian, for that Doctrine, and Service, and Trial, by which Mankind are to expreſs their Obedience to him, ſo long as there ſhall continue to be any State of Diſcipline, or Obedience at all.

In the mean while, had not this been ſo diſtinctly foretold, yet Reaſon might abundantly convince Men, that what Days ſoever were in this Senſe *the laſt*, the cleareſt and fulleſt Diſcoveries of God and his Will, are a Privilege certainly belonging to them. For the Notion of a Being abſolutely perfect will naturally lead us to conclude, that no Deſign or Work of ſuch a Being ſhall be ſuffered to want its due Perfection. If therefore the revealing himſelf to Mankind, in any Degree at all, be an Action worthy of ſuch a Being; the ſame Goodneſs which diſpoſed him to this, cannot but diſpoſe him to do it in ſuch Degrees, as are neceſſary for all the Purpoſes, which that Revelation was intended to ſerve. And, if this were not done, in all the fulneſs deſigned, by the Firſt Diſcoveries; This is an Argument that there is ſome future and larger Diſcovery in reſerve, by which the defects of thoſe Former ſhall be effectually ſupplied. So again, If God, for Cauſes known to his infinite Wiſdom, have thought fit to accommodate different Diſpenſations, to different Times and Places; we have Reaſon to look upon Each of theſe in its Order, as a nearer Approach to Perfection; and upon the Final One, as That, which hath all to recommend and enforce it, which can be neceſſary, or ought to be, expected. For infinite Wiſdom cannot change but for the better; And therefore, when it declares itſelf unchangeably fixed, in any Method of promoting its own Glory, and the Good of its Creatures; We may, I think, ſafely depend upon it, not only that this laſt Choice is preferable to all that went before; but that there cannot be another better. And that, upon this very Account, becauſe God hath determined, there ſhall not be any other after it.

As therefore it was an Honour due to the Days of the

the Meſſiah, that they ſhould be the *laſt* Days; ſo it is certainly a Mercy to be highly eſteemed, and acknowledged with all imaginable Thankfulneſs, that Almighty God hath reſerved us to theſe Days. To a Seaſon of the brighteſt Light; Not the Glimmerings of feeble Reaſon uninſtructed by Divine Revelation; Not the diſtant Proſpects of a riſing Sun, refracted upon us through thick Clouds of Figures and Ceremonies, but the clear Shine of Truth and Righteouſneſs: Not a Seaſon, in which it was impoſſible, even for the beſt diſpoſed Minds, to arrive at thoſe Meaſures of ſpiritual Knowledge, which every Man, ſincerely diſpoſed to know, may now without great Difficulty attain to; But That, in which this Apoſtle's Obſervation is in this reſpect true alſo, that we are Perſons, for *whom God hath provided better things*, that ſo even the faithfulleſt and moſt excellent of his Servants heretofore, *ſhould not* however *without us be made perfect*.

The like Advantage may this Doctrine boaſt of, above all that went before, with regard to the *Manner* of imparting it to the World. It was not proclaimed in Thunder and Lightning, in Flames of Fire, and Clouds of Smoke, like the Law on Mount *Sinai*. It was not enforced by Miracles of Vengeance and Terror, ſuch as might eſtabliſh its Authority upon the ſlaviſh Principle of Fear. Nor were its Myſteries communicated, by any Infuſions of the Spirit, ſo fierce and over-bearing, as to create any Diſturbance of Reaſon, any Agonies of Body, or Alienation of Mind, in the Parties receiving them. But this whole Matter was tranſacted, by the moſt eaſy and familiar Methods, and with all poſſible Marks of Kindneſs and Condeſcenſion. A Maſter gentle and lowly ſtooping to the Capacities of the meaneſt, not diſdaining the Converſation of the vileſt, provided they were vile in their own Eyes, and applied to him for Inſtruction and Amendment. Confirming the Truth of what he taught, by Wonders of Mercy and Love; ſuch as had a natural Tendency to win, rather than affright Men; to

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engage the Affections, at the ſame time they convince the Judgment; and void of all Conſtraint, except that ſoft and welcome, and in all reaſon that ſtrongeſt and leaſt reſiſtible of any, the Force of Ingenuity and Gratitude, of Goodneſs unexampled, and Benefits never to be requited, never acknowledged, as they deſerve. Doctrines, inculcated with all the Freedom of a Three Years intimate Acquaintance, and afterwards by the immediate and plentiful Inſpirations of the Spirit of God himſelf; propagated by the Gift of Tongues, by which their firſt Teachers were enabled, without Art or Study, to addreſs themſelves readily to Hearers of different Nations and Languages; Deliver'd with all poſſible Simplicity, and Plainneſs of Expreſſion; urged with the weightieſt and moſt proper Arguments; And faithfully recorded, for the Benefit of ſucceeding Ages, by Men aſſiſted by the ſame Spirit, ſo as to ſecure them from all Danger of Falſhood or Miſtake; and upon every Occaſion, ſo acted from Above, as both to ſpeak and write the Words of Soberneſs, as well as Truth. So different is the Caſe of Chriſtians, who live under a Revelation, Eaſy and clear, in all neceſſary Points of Faith and Practice, Full and expreſs in Matters eſſential to Salvation, from theirs, whoſe Service was a *Figure of good things to come*, whoſe Light was darted through a Cloud, and mingled with Shadows; and whoſe brighteſt Diſcoveries were wrapped up in dark and enigmatical Phraſes, proper to the Prophetick Stile. The one was a ſealed Book, to be unlocked by future Events; the Other, a plain Relation of thoſe Events already brought to paſs. The one propoſed a Happineſs in proſpect and deſire, the Other contained Promiſes accompliſhed, and that long expected Happineſs now in actual Poſſeſſion. Such and ſo many, more indeed and nobler than the Limits of this Diſcourſe, and the Greatneſs of the Subject, will allow to be repreſented in their juſt Proportions, are the Prerogatives of this Diſpenſation. And yet even all that is already, and all that might be

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ſaid upon my *Firſt*, comes infinitely ſhort of that Pre-eminence, which makes my

II. *Second* Head: The Excellence, I mean, of that Perſon by whom this Revelation was imparted to us. For there the Apoſtle evidently lays his main Streſs; God ſpake in Times paſt to our Fathers *by the Prophets*, but *to Us* in theſe laſt Days he hath ſpoken *by his Son*.

Now the Deſign of this Place is to prove the Dignity of this laſt Meſſenger, to be ſo far ſuperior to that of any other, as to admit of no Likeneſs, no Compariſon between them: That he hath Excellencies peculiar to himſelf, and ſuch as are communicable, not only to none, no not the beſt of the Sons of Men; but to none, no not the nobleſt Creatures, of any other Kind. In a Word, that he is of a nature truly Divine, of the ſame Eſſence and Eternity with God the Father, and his Son in a Manner and Senſe ſo proper and particular, as no other, however called ſuch in Scripture, is, or muſt be underſtood to be.

Now ſince the Majeſty of an Infinite God muſt needs be too vaſt, not only for any Words, but even for the moſt extended Thought, of a Comprehenſion, ſo narrow as Ours; Great Care muſt be taken, in the expounding of Scripture, not to inſiſt too rigorouſly upon thoſe Images and Repreſentations, which are made uſe of there, to rectify our Notions of things ſo far above us. For Theſe, in truth are uſed, not becauſe they expreſs the Matter fully and in all its parts, but becauſe we are not capable of better. And again, ſince One and the ſame Image will not ſuffice, to repreſent all that is neceſſary for us to believe; there is a neceſſity of doing it by Several. And therefore we muſt be ſure to obſerve, for what Purpoſe Each of Theſe is made choice of; and content ourſelves with applying it to that particular Difficulty, which it was brought to illuſtrate. Otherwiſe, if it be ſtretched beyond its Line, we may give Occaſion to perverſe and dangerous Conſequences: And make That, which ſhould be a Guard againſt Errors

Errors and Hereſies, a Foundation for ſtrange Inferences and Opinions, to which the Author never meant it ſhould extend. Theſe neceſſary Cautions being thus premiſed, I ſhall very briefly ſet before you the Arguments for the Divinity of our Bleſſed Saviour, contained in the Paſſage now under Conſideration.

The *Firſt is*, that God hath *appointed him Heir of all things*. By which, no doubt, we are to underſtand that univerſal Dominion, mentioned in other Texts, which call him a *Prince and a Saviour*, *Lord and Chriſt*, *Lord both of the Dead and Living*, *Lord of all*; which ſpeak of his *ſubduing all Enemies*, even Death itſelf, having all *things put under his Feet*, all *Power in Heaven and Earth given unto him*, *being gone into Heaven*, and *ſitting down on the right hand of God*, *Angels and Authorities and Powers being made ſubject unto him*. A Government, of which, as God, he ſtood poſſeſs'd from all Eternity: A Government, which however his Human Nature might have hereditary Title to, by Virtue, and ſo from the very Inſtant, of its Perſonal Union with the Divine; yet was he not, as God and Man both, actually inveſted with it, till after, and by way of Compenſation for, his Death and Sufferings. But a Government withal, which, were he not very God, as well as very Man, it is not to be conceived, how he could be qualified to exerciſe. There being, in the Reaſon of the Thing, no manner of Inducement to perſuade us, that any Power and Wiſdom, leſs than that which could create all things, can be ſufficient to govern all things. And therefore no Method of arguing could be imagin'd more regular or concluſive, than this of the Apoſtle: Which proceeds to ſhew in the

Acts v. 31. ii. 36. x. 36. Rom. xiv. 9. 1 Cor. xv. 25, 26. Mat. xxviii. 18. 1 Pet. iii. 22.

See Verſe 8. Phil. ii. 6, 11.

Second Place, That the Perſon, by whom God now rules the Worlds, is the ſame, by whom he *made the Worlds*. Thoſe very *Worlds*, no doubt, which this Epiſtle,

tle, by the ſame Expreſſion, reckons it, as the firſt Inſtance of Faith, for us to *underſtand, that they were framed by the Word of God, ſo that the things which are ſeen, were not made of things which do appear*. Conſequently, the Creation attributed here to the Son, is not any Spiritual or Figurative, but a Proper and Material One. Had the former only belonged to him, this had been no peculiar Excellence; for the Goſpel-State, conſiſting of the making Men New Creatures, is in part the Work of every Planter of the Goſpel. So that the *Worlds* in this Senſe, are what Chriſt's Diſciples, at leaſt what Chriſt by his Diſciples, made. And yet we never find, even the moſt diſtant Intimations, of the Son ever making the World in ſuch a Manner, as to have any Creature a Partner in the Performance. Not only ſo, but the Scriptures, inſtead of countenancing, directly overthrow this fond Imagination. For, whereas this metaphorical Creation, or renewing the World unto Righteouſneſs, could concern Mankind alone; the Son is declared to be the Maker of many things, which never had a part in any, but a Proper and Material, Creation. *For by Him were all things created, that are in Heaven, and that are in Earth, viſible and inviſible, whether they be Thrones or Dominions, or Principalities or Powers, all things were created by him and for him.*

Heb. xi. 3.

Coloſ. i. 16.

Thoſe laſt Words do likewiſe effectually refute another Error, advanced upon this Occaſion. By which it is pretended, that Almighty God, in making the World, made uſe of the Son's Co-operation, in the Quality of a Servant, or Inſtrument only. For upon theſe Terms, how true ſoever it might be, that *all things were created by him*, yet could it not poſſibly be true, that all things *were created for him* too. Nor is it to be ſuppoſed, that any Holy Man, ſpeaking by Divine Inſpiration, ſhould addreſs himſelf to any Perſon, acting in an inferior Capacity, as the Pſalmiſt hath done in a Paſſage quoted here, *Thou, Lord, in the beginning haſt*

Ver. 10, 11, 12.

haſt lain the Foundations of the Earth, and the Heavens are the Work of thy Hands; They ſhall periſh, but thou endureſt; and they all ſhall wax old as doth a Garment; and as a Veſture ſhalt thou fold them up, and They ſhall be changed; but thou art the ſame, and thy Years ſhall not fail. So natural is the Inference from hence alſo, that the Son (as was hinted before) therefore rules the World, becauſe he made the World; That he was in ſuch a Senſe and Manner the Maker, as to be likewiſe the Proprietor, and rightful Lord, of it. And conſequently, that he acts, not in Subordination to any Higher Being, but in Aſſertion of his own Prerogative, by maintaining and governing his own World.

This is yet farther confirmed, by that Deſcription of him in the next Words, that he is the *Brightneſs of his Father's Glory*, and the *expreſs Image of his Perſon.* Upon which, not to philoſophize with too bold a Niceneſs, let it ſuffice to ſay, that the former of theſe Characters (alluding to a Luminous Body, and comparing the Father to the Original Fountain of Light, and the Son to the Effulgence or Ray ſtreaming from it) ſeems intended to teach us, that the Eſſence of both is the ſame; that the One is inſeparable from, and not to be conceived without, the other; Conſequently, that Neither of them either ever was, or could be, alone. So that the Son is hereby declared, to be of the ſame Nature and Eternity with the Father, and from hence, more particularly, the Church ſeems to have taken the Occaſion of confeſſing, in Oppoſition to the *Arian Hereſy*, as we find it done in one of our Creeds, that *Jeſus Chriſt, the only begotten Son of God*, was *begotten of his Father before all Worlds*, that he is *God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Of One Subſtance with the Father, By whom all things were made.*

Creed commonly called Nicene.

But leſt ſo full a Declaration of this Unity of Subſtance might be unwarily, or perverſely, made a Foundation, for inferring from thence an Unity in all

other Reſpects whatſoever; the latter of theſe Characters reſembles him to an Image, or Impreſs, of his Father's Excellencies. Now, ſince, in all created Beings, the thing which makes, and that which receives, the Impreſſion, hath each a diſtinct Subſiſtence of its own; ſo it is alſo in the Caſe before us. Not ſo indeed, as in created Beings, where theſe Two things differ in Nature and Subſtance alſo; but ſo far thus, as can conſiſt with the Character given juſt before. Which, having affirmed the Nature and Duration of theſe Two to be exactly the ſame, muſt needs forbid us, from this other Character, to draw any Conſequences deſtructive of, or any way diſagreeable to, the Former. And therefore having already eſtabliſhed the Unity of Nature, in the Similitude of Original and Derived Light; the Apoſtle might ſafely make uſe of another Similitude, which (following after, and taken in Conjunction with That) could not poſſibly extend farther, than to a Diſtinction of Perſon. And thus he hath likewiſe obviated the Hereſy of *Sabellius*; by affirming the Father and Son to have the ſame Godhead, Glory, and Majeſty; but at the ſame time intimating, that they have not the ſame Perſonality. In a Word, that though the Father and the Son be One God, and in that reſpect there be no difference in Nature, or Time or Degree, yet the Father is not the Son, nor the Son the Father. And, in this reſpect, there is a juſt, and very material, Diſtinction of Order, and Dignity, mutual Relation, and manner of Subſiſting.

There is indeed another Reaſon for theſe Expreſſions, with regard to Us. And they belong moſt ſtrictly to our Bleſſed Saviour; Not only, as he is of the ſame Divine Nature and Glory with the Father; But, as by Him the Excellencies of that Nature and Glory are moſt clearly manifeſted to the World. For never were the Wiſdom, the Power, the Holineſs, the Juſtice, and above all, the Goodneſs of God, ſo conſpicuous, as in the Preaching the Miracles, the Life and Death, the

Reſurrection and Exaltation, of the Adorable Jeſus. So that St. *John* had reaſon to ſay, in Alluſion to the Marks of God's ſpecial Preſence in the *Jewiſh* Tabernacle and Temple, *We beheld the Glory of the Word made Fleſh, the Glory as of the Only begotten of the Father*; *and* St. *Paul*, that *God who commanded the Light to ſhine out of Darkneſs, hath ſhined into our Hearts, to give the Light of the Knowledge of the Glory of God, in the Face* (or Perſon) *of Jeſus Chriſt*. But ſtill this is ſuch a Glory, as could not have ſhined upon us, had it not been the ſame with that of the Father; and this is therefore the Effect of our Lord's Divine, but could not poſſibly proceed from his Human Nature.

John i. 14.

2 Cor. iv. 6.

As little is it to be conceiv'd, that to this Human Nature, and no other, ſhould be aſcribed that governing and preſerving Providence, attributed to the Son, in thoſe next Words, that he *upholdeth all things by the Word of his Power*. Surely no Being, leſs than that which made the World, is capable of ſuſtaining and continuing the Order of the World. And therefore, though this be now done by the Son, who is Man as well as God; yet is it, truly and properly, the Work of that Divine Nature, which was from all Eternity at the right Hand of the Father: Not of that Human Nature, which, being united to, and from thenceforth inſeparable from the Divine, is now together with it exalted thither. And this Exaltation is here ſpoken of, as a Reward of thoſe Sufferings, and of that expiatory Sacrifice for the Sins of Mankind, which that Union with the Divine rendered of Merit as invaluable, as the Condeſcenſion of it is inexpreſſible.

One Argument more the Apoſtle here makes uſe of, to prove the Excellence of this Author of the New Covenant; And that is, The manifeſt Precedence, given to him in the *Old Teſtament*, above the moſt glorious of all Created Beings, the bleſſed Angels. The Proof hereof conſiſts in ſundry Paſſages, ac-

knowledged, by *Jewiſh* Authors themſelves, to belong to the Meſſias; who is, in a Senſe and Manner peculiar to himſelf, entitled the *Son of God*; while the Angels are allowed no higher a Denomination, than that of Miniſters and Servants of God. Nay, and to ſhew the mighty diſtance and diſparity between them, thoſe very Angels are, all of them, commanded to *worſhip* this Son. A Homage, to which nothing leſs could give him Right, than his being their Creator, and They his Creatures. At other times we find him repreſented, as a righteous King poſſeſs'd of an everlaſting Dominion, and inveſted with ſuch diſtinguiſhing Honours, as none, even the Higheſt and moſt peculiar Favourites of Heaven, were, or may ever hope to be dignified with. And once more, Not only the Creation of the World, but the Diſſolution of it alſo, is expreſly declared to be His Doing. Mean while the utmoſt attributed to the Angels, amounts to no more, than their being Inſtruments in the Hand of God. Performers of ſuch good Offices, to thoſe who love and ſerve him, as He, who hath conſtituted the Services of all his Creatures in a wonderful Order, hath thought fit to aſſign them in the Protection of good Men, and in the Government of the World.

Ver. 5.

Ver. 6, 7.

Ver. 8, 9.

Ver. 10. *to the end of the Chapter.*

Now theſe were Arguments very fit to be uſed to the *Hebrews* in particular; Becauſe the *Jews*, from whoſe Religion they had lately been converted, appear to have borne a greater Reverence, and to have aſcribed much more, to the Angels, in the making of the World particularly; than their Scriptures had any where given them warrant to do. They had *received* their *Law*, as St. *Stephen* expreſſes it, *by the Diſpoſition of Angels*; Their Fathers were conducted by them from *Egypt* to the promiſed Land; They had been bleſſed with many ſignal Deliverances by their Interpoſition; They had been favour'd with many Viſions,

Acts vii. 53.

Viſions, and Revelations, of great Importance, by theſe Meſſengers; They had the Oracles of God, and his ſpecial Preſence exhibited to them, upon extraordinary Emergencies, by Spirits appearing in this Form. What then could be more ſeaſonably urged, upon Perſons of ſuch Principles and Privileges, in Honour of the Chriſtian Diſpenſation; than a Proof, that its Author was, not only ſuperior to the Angels, but infinitely their Superior? So that the Excellence even of thoſe noble Beings, above the very Vileſt, is not to be named with that of Chriſt above them. In one Caſe, the Difference is only in Place and Degree. Some are in higher, ſome in lower Stations, but ſtill all Fellow-Servants and Fellow-Creatures. In the other we have no Foundation for ſo much as a Compariſon; but Servants and their Lord, Creatures and Creator, the humbleſt Adoration, and the moſt abſolute Dominion. So diſtant are the Diſpenſers of theſe Two Revelations; and conſequently ſo ſmall, even none at all, is the Glory of the former, when ſet againſt the Latter, which, in this reſpect, excelleth all Others in Glory.

The Reſult then of my Second Head is this, *That* the Goſpel claims a juſt Pre-eminence above any other Revelation of God's Will to Mankind; Becauſe, not only the Firſt and remote Declarer, but the immediate Publiſher and Diſpenſer of it, was a Perſon truly and ſtrictly Divine. So that, when God ſpoke to our Forefathers by the Prophets, it was by Men, who in all Points (their particular Inſpiration excepted) ſtood upon the level with thoſe they ſpoke to. But when he ſpoke to Us by his Son, he ſpoke by himſelf, and without the Ceremony of an inferior Meſſenger. An Honour and Advantage This to Us; A Kindneſs and Condeſcenſion in Him, which at all times deſerves to be conſider'd: But, at this Feſtival eſpecially, ſhould be remember'd, with the moſt zealous Expreſſions of Wonder and Praiſe. And, for the more effectual exciting theſe Affections in our Minds, I did propoſe to leave the

Two Heads, already treated of, with ſome Reflections, ſuitable to the Solemnity of the Day, and the Subſtance of this *Epiſtle*. But, this Diſcourſe having already exceeded its juſt Meaſure, and the *Goſpel* furniſhing Matter, to which they will be no leſs applicable, I rather chuſe to reſerve them for the cloſe of the Whole, and offer them there entire; than to divide ſuch Meditations, between Two Paſſages of Scripture, which ſeem to have each a fair, if not an equal, Title to them.

The GOSPEL.

PARAPHRASE. St. John i. 1. to 15.

IN the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

1. Before Time or the World was, the *Word* (a Title underſtood by the generality of the *Jews*, and many Heathens of that and former Ages, to denote a Divine Perſon) had a Being; and did exiſt inſeparably with God, yea and was himſelf literally and truly God.

2. *The ſame was in the beginning with God.*

2. Yet was not this Perſon the whole God-head, but becauſe he did from all Eternity exiſt in and from another Perſon in this Godhead, therefore it is, that I affirm him to have been ſo with God, that there was never any Time, in which God was, and the Word was not.

3. *All things were made by Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.*

3. Nor did he only never begin to be himſelf, but he was the Cauſe and Author of Being to all things elſe; ſo that, whatever in Heaven or in Earth, viſible or inviſible, is or ever was, which is not God; this Word was, in the ſtricteſt and propereſt Senſe of that Expreſſion, the Maker and Creator of it.

4. *In Him was Life, and the Life was the Light of Men.*

4. All things indeed ſubſiſt and live by Him, but Mankind do ſo in the moſt excellent Senſe and Manner. For to Them he is the Author of eternal Life. And the Diſcovery of, and Way to This, is the true, the beſt, and only valuable Knowledge, with which the Minds of Men are enlightened.

5. *And*

5. *And the Light ſhineth in Darkneſs, and the Darkneſs comprehended it not.*

5. A Light communicated to an ignorant and wicked World, but their Minds are ſo darkened with Prejudices and Paſſions, that they refuſe, and are never the better for it.

6. *There was a man ſent from God, whoſe name was John.*

6. Not that there was any want of Evidence, had they been rightly diſpoſed to receive it. For he had the Teſtimony of *John* Baptiſt in particular, whoſe Authority could not be denied to proceed from God.

7. *The ſame came for a Witneſs, to bear witneſs of the Light, that all men through him might believe.*

7. And yet the very end he was ſent for, is no other than to teſtify, that this Perſon was He, in whom Men ought to believe, and to prepare them for doing ſo.

8. *He was not that Light, but was ſent to bear witneſs of that Light.*

8. 'Tis evident from the whole Courſe of *John*'s Miniſtry, that he was not, or ever pretended to be, that Teacher, upon whoſe Doctrine Men were to depend for eternal Salvation. No, his Buſineſs was to declare and lead People to him.

9. *That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*

9. And therefore they who value themſelves moſt upon being *John*'s Diſciples, muſt know, that whatever Advantages of this kind any Man ever did or can attain to, are all to be had from Him, whom *John* witneſſed to, and from him only.

10. *He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.*

10. And ſuch Advantages Men never wanted ſome Meaſures of, and Opportunities for; in regard that there were always ſome viſible Footſteps of his Providence and Grace in this his own World; but theſe the generality of Mankind attended not to, though created, and preſerved, and governed by him.

11. *He came unto his own, and his own received him not.*

11. Nay, which is yet a more lamentable Inſtance of Perverſeneſs and Stupidity, even the *Jews*, a People favoured with particular Revelations of his Will, and made his Peculiar, did yet reject him, when he came and converſed among, and applied himſelf more eſpecially to, them.

12. All did not thus refuse him indeed, and they who received him, (by which is meant the Belief of, and Obedience to his Doctrine) found their Account in it. For on all ſuch he beſtowed that moſt valuable Privilege of being the Children of God.

12. *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name.*

13. A Relation founded, not in any natural Deſcent, like thoſe which are contracted by material Principles conveyed, and ſenſual Inclinations gratified; Or, (as others) not in the Blood ſhed at Circumciſion, and a ritual Law; Nor in the Virtue of any thing Men can do, by improving their natural Reaſon, and living up to its beſt Principles; But wholly owing to God, whoſe Mercy, for the ſake of this *Word*, adopts us as his own, and by the Grace of his Holy Spirit, begets us to a new and better Life, and draws us to a Likeneſs of himſelf. The Method of conferring which Privilege is no leſs wonderful, than the Privilege itſelf.

13. *Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the fleſh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

14. This Divine Perſon, the *Word*, of whom I have hitherto been ſpeaking, the more effectually to impart theſe Bleſſings to the World, took the Human into his Divine Nature; became mortal Man, and converſed among us. The Perfections of God in the mean while reſiding in, and ſhining forth, out of this Tabernacle of his Fleſh, as evidently, as ever the Preſence of God was manifeſt from the Ark heretofore. (Inſomuch, that no Perſon leſs than the only Son of God, of the ſame Nature with his Father, could do what he did.) His Glory indeed far excelled that other, as exhibiting to us far greater Mercies, than the Levitical Diſpenſation. Such were, Pardon in full for all evil Things, from which Men could not be juſtified by the Law: And the Subſtance of thoſe good Things, of which that Law had only the Types and Shadows.

14. *And the Word was made Fleſh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.*

COMMENT.

THE Goſpel for this Feſtival purſues the ſame Deſign with the Epiſtle, by leading us to infer the Excellence of the Chriſtian Diſpenſation, from that

that of its Author. And, as there he was repreſented by the *Brightneſs of God's Glory*, and *the expreſs Image of his Perſon:* So is he here, by the *Word* of God, the neceſſary Emanation, the exact Image of the Divine Mind, and the *Light*, which from that Source of all Light, is by Him reflected upon *Men.* There he was ſtiled the *Maker of the Worlds*, and the *Upholder of all things by the Word of his Power:* Here it is declared, that he *made all things*, and that *in Him*, in Him alone *is Life.* Only, whereas the Author to the *Hebrews* contents himſelf with ſhewing, that the Perſon, by whom God *hath ſpoken to us in theſe laſt Days* is his own Son, of the ſame Divine Nature and Perfections with himſelf; St. *John* does treat this Subject more fully, by ſhewing, that this Perſon, of the ſame Nature with the Father, hath not diſdained to be made of the ſame Nature with Us too.

And this is the true Intent of St. *John*, in the Portion of Scripture now before us. It is not, to prove the *Word* a Perſon, no nor a Divine Perſon, no nor yet the Maker of all things; Theſe were Notions very familiar to the *Jews*; As is plain from the *Chaldee* Paraphraſts, which in thoſe Ages, were the Scriptures, read in their Synagogues publickly. Nor was it neceſſary for the Gentiles to be told this; Many of whoſe Philoſophers had mentioned the Λόγος or *Word*, as inſeparable from the Deity, and the Cauſe and Artificer of all things. So that thus far the Evangeliſt neither expreſſed himſelf in any uncouth Terms, nor affirmed any thing new. But that, which lay upon him to prove, for the Inſtruction and Conviction of both theſe ſorts of Men, was, that this Divine *Word* did come into the World; did converſe among and enlighten Mankind, with thoſe Diſcoveries of Truth and Salvation, contained in the Goſpel, and did do, and ſuffer, all thoſe wondrous things related there at large, in the Perſon of our Redeemer. And the making this good was the proper, the only Courſe, for anſwering

ing the Main End of writing this Goſpel. That End, we are told, was to confute the Errors of *Cerinthus*, and ſuch other Hereticks, as held our Bleſſed Saviour to be a mere Man, but denied his Divinity, and Exiſtence, before his being born of his Mother, and appearing in the World.

A Doctrine, effectually overthrown, by proving the *Word*, which had a Being from all Eternity, and made all things, and conſequently was very God, to be the ſame that afterwards dwelt in Human Fleſh, and which from thenceforth exiſted no longer as a Divine Perſon, ſeparate and alone, but as God and Man both, known by the Name and Character of Jeſus Chriſt. The Truth of whoſe Divinity having been, I hope, ſufficiently cleared in my Laſt Diſcourſe, I ſhall only take notice now of ſome few Particulars, which did not fall within the Compaſs of the Epiſtle for this Day; and then proceed to ſuch Reflections, as both That, and my preſent Subject, ſuggeſt to us.

And *Firſt*, We have here an Account, from whence Mankind received all that Prerogative of Reaſon and Knowledge, by which they are diſtinguiſhed from, and advanced above, the inanimate and brute parts of the Creation. Thoſe Notices of God, of Good and Evil, of their Duty in This, and their Exiſtence in a future State, and whatever elſe it is, wherein the primitive Brightneſs of Man's Underſtanding, and the Rectitude of his Will conſiſted, All were derived from this Word, the Fountain of Life. So that to him we ſtand indebted, for all the Natural, as well as ſupernatural Wiſdom, we ever were poſſeſſed or capable of. All was a Ray darted upon the Soul by this *Brightneſs of his Father's Glory:* All an Impreſs of this *Image of his Perſon*, ſtamped upon a Creature formed after his own Likeneſs: And all this, with the greateſt Propriety, ſtiled the *Life and Light of Men*, becauſe ſuch Knowledge is the Guide to, the Ground of Immortality: The very thing, by which our Souls

ſubſiſt,

ſubſiſt, or can attain to the Happineſs prepared for them as the proper and ultimate End of their Creation.

2. In the next Place we may obſerve the Operations of this Divine *Word*, in Man's depraved State; deſcribed by a *Light ſhining in Darkneſs*, and *the Darkneſs not comprehending it*, by *being in the World*, and the *World not knowing* even *Him* by whom *it was made*. Whereby we are given to underſtand, both the Miſery of that State, and the Cauſe of it. The Former is intimated in the Word *Darkneſs*, the Latter in the *Light* not *being comprehended* by that *Darkneſs*. From both which put together, we are led to conclude, that, even in the moſt benighted Ages of the World, this Sun of Righteouſneſs did not ceaſe to ſhine; And, if the Effect of that Shining were ſo wofully ſmall, as in ſome Places and Times it muſt, (to the great Reproach of Human Nature) be confeſſed to have been; the Reaſon is, becauſe the Light he ſhed was broken, and ſhut out, by the Follies or the Vices, that thick impenetrable Night, which Men had, by Neglect of God firſt, and then by Induſtry, and Cuſtom in evil-doing, made about their own Minds. And this is what Men not only might do then, but may even now or at any time, do, by ſearing their Conſciences, ſtupifying their Senſes, blinding their Eyes, and ſinning away their very firſt Principles, all Regard for, all Diſtinction between, Moral Good and Evil. In the Mean while this Divine Word was, in all Ages, and under every Diſpenſation, ſhedding his Light in ſuch Meaſures, and by ſuch Methods, as his own infinite Wiſdom ſaw expedient. He was the Source of all that Light Men at any time enjoyed, to guide themſelves in the way to Immortality by; Of all that which they did, and of all that too, which either through their Weakneſs, or their Wilfulneſs, they did not, receive.

3. How great a part this Laſt Cauſe had in the Common Calamity and Corruption of Mankind, is very evident from the *Tenth* and *Eleventh* Verſes. The Former obſerves

obſerves ſo wretched a Degeneracy, as kept the World in Ignorance of the very Author of their Being, by not attending to thoſe viſible Footſteps of a Divine Power and Providence, of which a moderate Conſideration of Natural Cauſes and Effects, and the Order and Government of the Univerſe, was capable of preſerving a conſtant and reverent Senſe. The latter expoſes the particular Diſingenuity of that unperſuadable People, to whom this *Word* made nearer Approaches of Kindneſs and more liberal Communications of himſelf and his Will, than to any other. And all this, to little other Effect, than to render the Guilt and Ingratitude of being ſhamefully repulſed by Them, who ought to have been moſt forward to entertain him, ſo much the more notorious and inexcuſable. From all which taken together, the Account given here, what this Divine *Word* is in his own Nature, What he was, and how he exhibited himſelf to Mankind in their firſt Eſtate; What, to the generality of them in their fallen Condition, and what, to the *Jewiſh* Nation in particular; we are abundantly inſtructed, where to lay the Blame of their Wickedneſs; and how it came to paſs, that no larger Improvements were made, of all the Advantages and Opportunities of knowing and doing better, *viz.* The *Word* and his *Light* were always preſent with them; but they who might, yet did not, would not, ſee and walk by it; And, even when this *Light* ſhone brighteſt, and this *Word* converſed moſt familiarly among Men; it was not a Favour wholly new, but only a different and clearer Manifeſtation of Himſelf. This Degree and Manner of it was indeed reſerved for that and after Ages, who were taught by the Word Incarnate; But the Word, though not Incarnate, was a Teacher common to every Age. And conſequently, it was *always the Condemnation* that *Men loved Darkneſs rather than Light*; though the Times of the Goſpel, after this *Word* being *made Fleſh*, have this peculiar Aggravation of their Crimes, that the Evil of their Deeds is an Op-

poſition

position againſt the ſtrongeſt Light; And ſo their Love and Preference of Darkneſs is more affected and obſtinate, than that of Any, who had gone before them.

4. In the mean while, there wanted no Encouragement to Mens better Behaviour in this reſpect. Quite contrary. The Terms, on which he offered his Guidance, were ſuch, that They who refuſed Him, refuſed their own higheſt Honour and Happineſs. For, as *many as received him, to them gave he Power to become the Sons of God.* What Honour, what Happineſs can be comparable to that of being the Sons of God? Related, in ſo near and tender a Capacity, to a Father ſo Powerful, ſo Holy, ſo Wiſe, ſo Good; that it is not poſſible for the Wants, or even the Wiſhes of any Child of His, to extend to any Meaſure of things neceſſary or profitable, which will not find itſelf fully anſwered, infinitely exceeded, both by his Ability, and his Inclination, to ſupply them? And therefore, when we have ſtretched our Thoughts to the utmoſt length, in repreſenting the Greatneſs of this Privilege; they will at laſt be forced to ſtop ſo far ſhort of its Dignity, that the moſt becoming way of Contemplating the Goodneſs of this Father, and the Felicity of theſe Children, will be, to ſit down full of Thanks and Wonder; and to cry out with St. *John*, *Behold what manner of Love the Father hath beſtowed upon us, that we ſhould be called the Sons of God!* 1 John iii. 1.

5. And yet we ſhall perhaps find cauſe to abate of our Wonder, that this ineſtimable Privilege ſhould not, that any thing indeed ſhould be thought too much for us; after that ſtill more amazing Miracle of Mercy which this Scripture propounds, in the Laſt Place, to our Conſideration: *The Word being made Fleſh, and dwelling among us*, and *manifeſting forth his Glory, the Glory as of the only begotten of the Father*, &c. Than which Account, as none can in Reaſon be deſired more expreſſive of this *Word* ſubſiſting, really and actually, in our Human Subſtance and Form; ſo it is admirable

able to obſerve the *Decorum* of the Apoſtle's Stile, upon that Occaſion, and how it is ſuited to the Majeſty of the Perſon that did ſo. For, having ſpoken all along of the *Word*, as Eternal and truly Divine: And coming now to ſpeak of his Exiſting, in a different manner from what he had done heretofore; to take off all Suſpicion of his being degraded by that Condeſcenſion, he makes uſe all along of Phraſes, well known to the *Jews*, and ſuch as plainly allude to thoſe Appearances under the Old Teſtament, which they acknowledged to belong to the true God only. Theſe therefore are Intimations, that the ſame Divinity which then filled Their Tabernacle and Ark of the Teſtimony, had now choſen a Human Body for his Tabernacle. And, as he then exhibited himſelf to their Fathers, by a ſhining Glory, and other miraculous Tokens of his Preſence; So was this ſame Preſence rendered ſufficiently conſpicuous in this other Tabernacle, by ſuch diſtinguiſhing Characters, and wonderful Operations, as proved the Perſon bearing, and doing, them to be truly Divine. Here then is the Subject of Aſtoniſhment, never to be ſufficiently admired and adored; not only that we ſhould be exalted to be the Children of God, but that the Son of God ſhould vouchſafe to become the Son of Man, thereby to make Us the Sons of God. Here the Foundation of our Faith is a Privilege, which otherwiſe it had been the higheſt Preſumption to entertain a Thought of, had not He united Our Nature inſeparably to his own; and, by taking part with the Adopted, admitted Them to a Part with the Only Begotten.

Thus much ſhall ſuffice for the Obſervations, intended to be raiſed from this Scripture. It only remains now, that the Whole be concluded with ſome Reflections, proper to the Subject, and the Solemnity of this Day.

1. And *Firſt*, To begin where the Epiſtle for this Feſtival does, with the Advantage of being *ſpoken to*, or taught by the Son of God, above that allowed to thoſe

thoſe Ages heretofore, who were inſtructed by his Prophets. This may appear in ſundry, but Particularly in theſe following, Reſpects.

(1.) In the Sufficiency and Qualifications of Our Teacher, ſuperior to thoſe of any other Perſon, at any time delegated to this Office. This is what St. *John* hath obſerved, in thoſe very remarkable Texts to this Purpoſe, *No Man hath ſeen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the boſom of the Father, he hath declared him.* And again, *He whom God hath ſent ſpeaketh the Words of God, for God giveth not the Spirit by meaſure unto him.* To which we may add a Third, deliver'd by our Bleſſed Saviour concerning himſelf, *No Man hath aſcended up into Heaven, but He that came down from Heaven, even the Son of Man which is in Heaven.* The moſt exquiſite Happineſs Mankind are deſign'd for, or capable of, conſiſts in a Reſemblance firſt, and then an Enjoyment, of God. But it is neceſſary firſt to know the Excellencies of that Object, we labour to reſemble. This, when God is our Object, is what no Strength of our own Faculties can enable us to do. For he dwells in *Light* and Glory *inacceſſible*; and therefore all the Approaches we make towards Him, are owing to thoſe Communications, he is graciouſly pleaſed to make of himſelf to Us. The Perſons he makes uſe of, as his Inſtruments to this Purpoſe, can impart to others only in ſuch Proportions, as he had imparted to Them. And All his Diſtributions of this kind to any mere Man, as they are limited by other Reaſons and Ends, beſt known to his own Wiſdom; ſo muſt they, in the Nature of the thing, be bounded by the Capacity of the Receiver. Now This, in the very nobleſt and moſt comprehenſive of Created Beings, muſt be infinitely too narrow to take in the Perfections of God, as they are. For this is the Peculiar Advantage of the Son of God, that he is in *his Father's Boſom, ſees him as he is*, hath the *fulneſs of the Spirit*

John i. 18. iii. 34.

John iii. 13.

Spirit in himself, is the *Wisdom* and *Word of the Father*; Inseparable from him; And therefore, even then, when he came down to teach and converse with Men upon Earth, was still in Heaven, the same God continuing there while manifested in the Flesh as Man here. This then is our Security; that, as Knowledge is the very Life of the Soul, the Seed of Immortality and Bliss in us, we are provided with a Teacher, whose Abilities are above any Defect. And if good Care be taken, not to be wanting to our own Improvement; we cannot fail of becoming *wise unto Salvation*, when enjoying the Benefit of being Instructed by that Teacher, who is at once the Perfection, and the Fountain, of all Wisdom.

2. By means of such a Teacher we have an effectual Prevention against Two very great, and very common Inconveniencies, proceeding from Two the most distant Affections of Mind, towards our Spiritual Guides.

(1.) The one is, Having their Persons and Parts in undue Admiration. This gives mistaken or designing Men a mighty Opportunity of propagating their own Errors, or Interests, or Passions, together with the Truth; and of leading, even whither they please, those who have blindly deliver'd up their Souls to their Direction. How powerfully this Principle sometimes operates, and what pernicious Effects it hath, if daily fresh Instances did not convince us, yet that of the *Jews*, in our Saviour's time, is but too evident a Proof. These Men were even content to shut their own Eyes, and see altogether with those of their Masters; and so thought themselves sufficiently borne out in their Obstinacy, while *not any of the Rulers or of the Pharisees had believed on him.* John vii. 48. Nor is their Danger in this so absolute Deference to the Judgment of others, only when our Teachers happen to be corrupt and against the Truth; but even at such Times as they are most sincere and zealous for it. For Men are still but Men, and, as such, liable to Ignorances and Infirmities. So that the Devoting ourselves entirely to the very best of these is a sort of

of Idolatry, a ſetting up Creatures in the Place of the Creator; and, making them to Us who do ſo, the Authors and Givers of thoſe Doctrines and Precepts, which it is their Buſineſs, only to inculcate and expound, and Ours to receive. To receive, not becauſe They teach them us; but becauſe God, who alone hath Authority and Dominion over the Conſciences of Men, teaches us by their Miniſtry. And therefore all they ſay, obliges us ſo far as it is agreeable with the Will of God, and no farther. Remarkable to this Purpoſe is that Caution of St. *Paul* to the *Corinthians*, *To the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord; But to the reſt ſpeak I, not the Lord.* You ſee how careful even this great Apoſtle was, to diſtinguiſh between a thing impoſed as a neceſſary Duty; and That, which was only recommended as prudent and ſeaſonable Advice; Thereby informing us, that, even from Perſons miraculouſly enlightened and aſſiſted by the Holy Ghoſt, all they deliver is not to be received alike. Even thoſe Illuminations and Aſſiſtances were limited to certain Meaſures and Occaſions; and conſequently the Reſpect, due to theſe very Perſons, might be guilty of Exceſs; if no Difference were made, between what was uttered by the Dictates of the *Spirit*, and what they ſpake, as the Senſe of their own Minds. But now, by the Son of God vouchſafing to ſpeak to us by himſelf, we are ſecured againſt all manner of ill Conſequences, that might grow from the Want or the Difficulty, of making ſuch Diſtinctions. The Inclination ſo natural to us, of tacking ourſelves too cloſe to Wiſe and Good Men, and over-rating the outward and immediate Inſtruments of our Knowledge and Virtue, is here not rooted out, but conducted ſafe. For it is now fixed upon One, who always was the inward and remote, but hath at laſt been pleaſed to make himſelf the next and viſible, Inſtructor of Mankind. The ſame abſolute Authority is hereby veſted in a Teacher like ourſelves, which was before due to none but God; and could not be aſcribed to the Greateſt and Holieſt of the ſame Nature with ourſelves.

1 Cor. vii. 10, 12.

Here can be no defect of Underſtanding or Judgment; No indirect End or ſubtle Deſign of miſleading us; No Interval or Inſtant of the Holy Ghoſt ceaſing to operate; No one Word merely Human, in Him, who cannot ſpeak any other than the Words of God; No Meaſure or Confinement upon Him, in whom *are hid all the Treaſures of Wiſdom and Knowledge, and all the Fulneſs of the Godhead dwelleth bodily.* And therefore in this, this ſingle Caſe, we may ſafely indulge our Affections to a viſible Guide; We may Believe and Obey without any manner of reſerve; and ought moſt thankfully to adore that kind Condeſcenſion to our Weakneſs, which, finding it ſo very hard to diſengage itſelf from ſenſible, and fix upon Objects ſpiritual and unſeen, for its Hope and Truſt; is now relieved by thoſe Approaches of God to Us, which we could not have made to Him. How ſuitable to our Temper are the Cords, wherewith now we are drawn, while a Liberty is indulged of truſting ourſelves to a Man; without any Robbery committed upon the Prerogative of God, to whoſe Guidance alone an unconditional Belief and Obedience are due?

Coloſſ. ii. 3, 9.

(2.) Another Extreme, directly oppoſite to the Former, which greatly obſtructs Mens Improvement in ſpiritual Knowledge, is the Contempt of their Teachers. Eſpecially, when the Meanneſs of their Natural or Acquired Endowments, or the Figure and Character they bear in the World, tempt their People to treat them with Scorn, and to proportion the Regards due to their Office, by thoſe falſe Meaſures, of their Learning, or their Fortunes. This is a Fault ſo very frequent, that not one, who obſerves at all, can be ignorant, how unequally Men carry themſelves upon the Account of ſuch Diſtinctions; What Weight and Influence Honours and Preferments give to every Word of Theirs, who are recommended by them; and how neglected the ſoundeſt Doctrine and the brighteſt Virtue paſs, where Poverty and Plainneſs, the want of Countenance from Great Men, and a retired Modeſt Piety, make no Shew

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or Noiſe abroad. 'Twas hence, that the Apoſtles of our Lord, becauſe illiterate and of low Degree, were ſo deſpiſed, as to be thought ſcarce worth the Anger of the *Jewiſh* Council. Hence, that our Lord himſelf, and his Doctrines, were by ſome thought ſufficiently confuted, by the Reproach of his being the reputed Son of a Carpenter; And, that his Miracles had leaſt Effect in that Country, where his Manner of Life and worldly Circumſtances were moſt known. But then this was the Caſe of ſuch who *judged* by the *outward Appearance* only; but never attended to the Demonſtrations of a Divine Power, with which thoſe Doctrines came confirmed. The opening of blind Eyes, unſtopping deaf Ears, looſing dumb Tongues, reſtoring withered and ſupplying maimed Limbs, reviving the Dead, and commanding even Graves to give back the Bodies of which they for ſome Days had kept Poſſeſſion, putting evil Spirits to flight, and extorting from Devils themſelves a Confeſſion of that Truth, which of all others they were moſt loth to have believed; Theſe were much more than a Balance againſt any outward Diſadvantages of Perſon and Condition. By Many of theſe the Apoſtles, who acted in the Quality of Servants only, got above the Prepoſſeſſions and the Malice of their Adverſaries. By all theſe, and by many, by infinitely more Evidences of a Divine Power; but particularly, by that Authority and commanding Influence, which proved this to be a Power, not only aſſiſting and working with him, but inherent in, and eſſential to him, Our Bleſſed Lord did Right to the Majeſty of One Nature even in the loweſt Ebb of the Other. This was *the Glory*, which manifeſted itſelf *to be the Glory of the only begotten of the Father*. And, tho' all Men did not even thus behold and acknowledge it, yet all who did, muſt needs honour and adore it. The Apoſtle allows, of the vileſt and moſt obſtinate Wretches, that, *had they known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of Life and Glory*. And even now, the only Evaſion

Acts v. 13, 21. Matth. xiii. 55, 58. Mark vi. 3, 6.

1 Cor. ii. 8.

Men have, to deſpiſe *Jeſus* and his Laws, is by denying, either that he is God, or that thoſe Laws are His. But Mankind never yet did, never can, degenerate into ſuch a monſtrous Abſurdity of Wickedneſs; as ſeriouſly to confeſs their Teacher to be God, and at the ſame time to ſlight the Perſon teaching them. Becauſe the Perfection and Majeſty of God, even according to Our Notions of him, are ſo tranſcendently glorious, and ſo incomparably great; as in the Eſteem of every reaſonable Man, not to be capable of Diminution or Blemiſh upon any Account whatſoever. Let then the Manner of God's appearing be what it will; yet ſtill, if it be God that ſpeaks, his every Word not only ought to be, but by all who conſider, and in good earneſt believe this, will naturally be, received with Honour and Thankfulneſs, the deepeſt Reverence, and moſt ſubmiſſive Awe.

Let us then, according to the Apoſtle's Advice, *ſee that we refuſe not him that ſpeaketh*, but remember, that it is a Speaker from Heaven; and one who hath a Right to all our Attention, and moſt ſtrict Obſervance. Let us with Thankfulneſs embrace the mighty Benefit, of one whoſe Knowledge knows no Bounds; and who, as He alone ſearches *All things, even the deep things of God*; ſo He, of all others, may be beſt depended upon, for imparting to us ſuch a Meaſure of Theſe, as his Divine Wiſdom ſees it convenient for us to know. Had Servants of Inferior Capacity been equally able to inſtruct us, there had been no occaſion for employing the Son. Had that Son, of Abilities ſo peculiar for this Purpoſe, wanted an Inclination equal to his Power; what Reaſon can we render of his undertaking ſo charitable an Office? But eſpecially, what Account can we render of our own Behaviour, if we ſuffer this Charity to have no Effect upon us: If we pretend to diſpute the moſt Authentick, to deſpiſe the Fulleſt, to neglect the Kindeſt Declaration of the Divine Will; A Declaration made by God himſelf to ſet it above all poſſible Suſpicion of Miſtake or Forgetfulneſs,

Heb. xii. 25.

getfulneſs, of Fraud or Frailty, or any of the too many Evaſions and Excuſes, which wicked Men ſo often had, and might again have found, to extenuate their Diſobedience, had this Meſſage been truſted to another Hand: And laſtly, a Meſſage every way worthy, (ſo far as any thing can be ſo) of that King of Heaven, who condeſcended to deliver it himſelf? Shall we pay leſs regard to the *Son*, than all, but the Profligate and Prophane, thought themſelves bound to pay to the *Prophets?* Shall we deny to the Maſter and Lord a Hearing and Reſpect, due to the meaneſt Servant producing his Commiſſion? The nobleſt and higheſt Order of thoſe Servants, even the bleſſed Angels, fall down and worſhip him; and ſhall We, placed in a lower Degree by Nature, but, by his Affection and tender Love, in ſome Senſe preferred above them, not acknowledge and adore our gracious Benefactor? *The Word ſpoken by thoſe Angels was ſtedfaſt, and every Tranſgreſſion againſt it received a juſt recompence of reward*; and can We hope to *eſcape* unpuniſhed, *if the great Salvation begun to be ſpoken* by Their and Our common Maſter and King ſhall be neglected? At leaſt, if it ſhall be neglected by Us, *who call him Maſter and Lord*; and, confeſſing him that hath ſpoken to be God, ſhall yet, by the moſt abſurd of all Contradictions, ſo impiouſly overturn our own Principles, as not *to do the things* that he *hath ſaid?* When the Law was promulged in Lightnings, and Clouds, and thick Smoke, by Trumpets and Thunders and Earthquakes, we find what Terror and Awe it ſtruck into the Hearers. And why was this, but from a Senſe, that this was the Voice of God? If then the ſame God now ſpeak, and give us Evidence ſufficient that This is his Voice alſo, is not the Argument for our Reverence and Duty the ſame? The Manner, it is confeſſed, of his publiſhing the new Covenant differs; but it is to the Perſon, and his Authority; not to any particular Method of manifeſting the One, or the Other, that our Obedience is due. And yet, ſuppoſing that too, we may be bold to ſay, That, in this

Heb. ii. 2, 3, 4.

Latter Diſpenſation of the Goſpel, there are ſome Circumſtances of peculiar Force, and even more engaging than any at the Publication of the Law. Which I hope to make appear by and by.

3. In the mean while, I obſerve in the *Third* Place, That We Chriſtians have the Advantage of a Teacher, ſuperior to all Others, not only in regard of his own perſonal Sufficiency, conſidered in himſelf as a Teacher; but as he is more, as he indeed is alone, capable of anſwering the Ends of, and giving Efficacy to, the Doctrines he came to teach us. The great Ends, which God ſeems to have intended the Doctrine of his Goſpel ſhould ſerve, are, The Enlightening our Minds, and purifying our Natures: Letting us into a nearer View of a future State, and the incommunicable Perfections of the Divine Nature; And bringing us to a better Likeneſs of thoſe that are communicable. With regard to the Former, *Jeſus Chriſt is ſaid to have brought Life and Immortality to Light*, to have *declared God*, to have *revealed thoſe things of God, which none* could *know* and conſequently none could tell, but *the Spirit of God:* and many other Paſſages we have to the like Purpoſe. And Who ſo fit, as *He that inhabiteth Eternity*, to inform Men, what thoſe *things* are, *which God hath prepared for them that love him?* Who could command our Belief of thoſe Myſterious Truths, which are too vaſt for Mortals to comprehend with an Authority equal to His, who, when he declared to us what God is, and does, did only declare to us himſelf, and his own Actions? Of Theſe, as it is plain, no Other could have, ſo it is no leſs plain, He could not but have, a clear and full Underſtanding: But This is what was ſufficiently ſpoken to before: That which I now would rather chuſe to make you ſenſible of, is, Our Advantage in the Latter of theſe Purpoſes the Goſpel is directed to: The exalting, I mean, and purifying our Nature; and ſo rendering us more like God, in thoſe of his Perfections, which may, and ought to be, imitated by us.

2 Tim. i. 10.
John i. 18.
1 Cor. ii. 11.

Now, This is, in Effect, only to refresh and restore that Image of God upon our Minds, in which Man at first was made. And, as the defacing of that Image by Sin consisted, not only in the bringing Darkness upon our Understanding, but Irregularity and Perverseness upon our Will and Affections; So, to retrieve it again, the informing our Judgments cannot suffice, without the Will and the Desires be influenced, to embrace and act those things, which we are instructed in the Excellence of. We are taught in our excellent Liturgy, when praying for a Blessing upon our Clergy, and the People committed to their Charge, to introduce that Petition, with the Stile and Title of an *Almighty God, who alone worketh great Marvels.* And very justly, since the Scriptures have told us, that *the Preparations of the Heart are from the Lord,* and that *Paul planteth, and Apollos watereth, but it is He that giveth the Increase.* Men may scatter the Spiritual Seed, they may explain the Word of Truth diligently and faithfully, may Reason strongly, exhort affectionately, rebuke courageously, enforce the Obligations to a Holy Life, and expose the Folly and Danger of a Wicked one very dextrously: But it is not in the Power of all their Industry, and Eloquence, and Zeal, to give one Word they say its proper Efficacy. They speak but to the Air, and sow upon barren Ground, till these outward Teachings are set forward, and seconded by the Inward. They cannot dispose one of their Hearers to consider and profit by their Doctrine, as they ought; Nay, even those Hearers cannot dispose themselves to This, without the preventing and assisting Grace of God. The Creation to a Spiritual, as well as to a Natural Life, is a Work peculiar to Him. And therefore here is the incomparable Pre-eminence of our Teacher, the Son of God, that he not only *spake as never Man spake,* but had the Hearts of them to whom he spoke, at his disposal; He could influence and incline them as he saw fit, and, by the secret Operations of his Spirit, purge and fit them for bringing forth that

Prov. xvi. 1.
1 Cor. iii. 5, 6.

Fruit, which no Human Power could produce; which no Prophet or Apoſtle, tho' immediately inſpired by God, could pretend to; which even his own Divine Diſcourſes miſſed of; So oft as he was not pleaſed to beſtow that Grace, without which, not only Ours, but His Preaching was in vain, and every Man's Hearing is and muſt be in vain.

Let us therefore, with all poſſible Thankfulneſs, acknowledge, and ſet a juſt Value on, our ineſtimable Privilege of *being taught by God*, without whom, all other Teachings ſignify ſo very little. Let our Wonder ceaſe, that ſo many Millions of Souls ſhould be ſo ſpeedily converted to this Faith; when convinced by Miracles wrought in the Power of that Spirit which He alone could ſend; and when drawn by Him, who alone could enable them to come. Let This abate of all unjuſt Partialities to the very beſt of Men; ſince it is not by our Miniſters, not by the moſt moving and powerful of theſe, that we improve in Goodneſs; but by His working in us mightily. Let us aſcribe to Him the whole Praiſe of that profiting by his Word, which is entirely his own Gift. And let us fervently and conſtantly pray, that He would ſoften and turn to his Fear thoſe Hearts, which, till he ſtrike upon them, are hard and impenetrable as a Rock. A Prayer, which we have all the Reaſon in the World to believe, he will not fail moſt graciouſly to accept and grant, who hath done ſo great Things for us already. Thoſe Things particularly, whereof we rejoice at this Holy Feſtival: when, in order to convey the Word of God to us more effectually, the eternal and eſſential *Word of God was* himſelf *made Fleſh*. And this brings me to Another ſort of Reflections, ſuch as more immediately relate to the Manner, in which the Son God vouchſafed to ſpeak to us; even by becoming one of us. A Myſtery too deep to be explained; too awful to be boldly and curiouſly pried into; and then improved to the beſt Purpoſe, when we receive it with Reverence and humble Faith, and endeavour to excite thoſe pious Affections,

which

which the ſober and earneſt Contemplation of it hath a natural Tendency to kindle, and cheriſh, and keep, up, in every devout Mind.

1. And *Firſt*, How ought we to be filled with Aſtoniſhment and holy Wonder, at this ſurpriſing and altogether new Inſtance, which God hath given of his Almighty Power, in the Incarnation of his bleſſed Son! I call it Surpriſing and altogether New, becauſe ſo very different from all the other Demonſtrations of Omnipotence, at any time exhibited to the World. The diſtance between God, and Any, nay All, created Beings, is ſo vaſt; as to admit no manner of Proportion, to found the leaſt Shadow of a Compariſon upon. And therefore every Action and Diſpenſation of His, which proclaims his Excellence above Theſe, is leſs amazing: Becauſe it is more agreeable with the Notions Men naturally have, of his infinite and incomprehenſible Greatneſs. But that God ſhould *empty*, and, as it were, go out of *himſelf*; that the Ancient of Days, whoſe *outgoings have been from everlaſting*, ſhould be born in *Bethlehem*, a Child, not an Hour old; that He who fills Heaven and Earth, ſhould be wrapped in *Swadling Clothes*; and the Majeſty of the High and Holy One *laid in a Manger*; that He whom all the *Angels worſhip*, ſhould vouchſafe to be made lower than the loweſt of thoſe Miniſtring Spirits, who are commanded to pay him Adoration; In a word, that the immortal and impaſſible Creator ſhould take upon him the Paſſions and Frailties, the Sufferings and Mortality of his own Creature; ſhould begin to live, ſhould grow, and be nouriſhed, and hunger, and thirſt, and be weary, and ſleep, and be grieved, and weep, and bleed, and die, and in all Points be tempted and afflicted, like unto us; This is ſomewhat, ſo exceeding Foreign to the Manifeſtations God hath uſed to make of himſelf; that it quite croſſes our common apprehenſions of him. That God could exalt himſelf beyond all Meaſure, beyond all Imagination, Men, who knew any thing at all of him, made no Difficulty to believe,

Phil. ii. 7. Mic. v. 2.

Luke ii. 12, 16.

But that he could to ſuch a degree abaſe himſelf, they never knew before. But when this Act had taught them it, they needs muſt ſee, that nothing leſs than Omnipotence could bring about the Miracles of this myſterious Condeſcenſion. And we may ſay with great Truth, that the Divinity of the *Word* is at leaſt equally evident, in his own being *made Fleſh*, as in *his making all Things*. *At leaſt:* For, could a Power which is Infinite, admit of Difficulties and Degrees; we muſt conceive it harder, for God to appear in the Form of Weakneſs, than to exert himſelf in the utmoſt Activity and Strength; *To make himſelf of no Reputation, and be found in faſhion as a Man*, than to glorify himſelf by the producing a whole World out of nothing; *To become obedient to the Death of the Croſs*, and be murdered by his Enemies, than to *blaſt* all that hate him, *with the Breath of his Diſpleaſure*, and command that whole World back to nothing in a Moment. So ſtupendous ſo unparallel'd, an Example of the Divine Power does the Incarnation of the Son of God preſent us with, above any Work of Creation, or Providence, or the moſt diſtinguiſhing Miracles, that ever were made uſe of, to prove it to Mankind.

2. Let us, in the *Second* Place, turn our Thoughts upon the adorable Wiſdom of God, in this wonderful Myſtery of his bleſſed Son's Incarnation. A Depth, which St. *Peter* acquaints us, *the Angels continually deſire to look into*, and take unſpeakable Delight in the Contemplation of. How then can We ſufficiently admire the Management of our God? Of Him, who, when Mankind had eſtranged themſelves from Him, found out a Method of drawing them near, and uniting them to him again, by condeſcending to unite himſelf to them, in ſo cloſe a manner, as that of taking the Manhood into God; Who, when they had defeated all the Means, formerly uſed for their Inſtruction, by the Miniſtry of his Servants beſt qualified for that Purpoſe, did not diſdain this laſt, and moſt powerful Experiment, of teaching them by himſelf;

1 Pet. i. 12.

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Of Him, who conſider'd Their Weakneſs, and His own tranſcendent Greatneſs, ſo kindly as to lay aſide the Terrors of his Majeſty, and the Brightneſs of that Glory, which rendered him inacceſſible; and to make it practicable for poor feeble Mortals to ſee, and approach, and converſe familiarly with him: Who thus found out the moſt effectual way of reconciling us to, and quickening us in our Duty, at once informing us by his Doctrine, and leading us by his Example; Of Him, who debaſed himſelf to a Participation of Our Infirmities, that he might ſanctify them to us, ſupport us under them, and prove that, all theſe notwithſtanding, we are capable of being exalted to a Participation of the Divine Excellencies; Who, by this nobleſt of all Stratagems, enabled that Nature to gain a full and fair Conqueſt over the Enemy of Souls, which had been ſo often vanquiſhed, ſo proudly inſulted, ſo long and mercileſly triumphed over, and trampled under by that Enemy before: Of Him, who, by being born of a Woman, hath begotten Mankind again to a lively Hope, and forbidden us to diſtruſt, that God and Man may be made One in Peace and Affection, whom we have ſeen already made One in the ſame Perſon: In ſhort, Who hath offered an Atonement, which cannot but be ſufficient and effectual to ſatisfy for Sin, ſince the Victim, the Sacrificer, and the Deity appeaſed are One. Theſe and a great many other Inſtances there be, which will occur to Men, who ſet themſelves to meditate on this Subject, as they ought. Illuſtrious Inſtances all, of the wonderful Wiſdom of God, manifeſted in this Scheme of our Redemption. But the Laſt does not only repreſent to us the *Wiſdom*; it leads to obſerve withal,

3. *Thirdly*, The *Juſtice* of God, ſo very conſpicuous upon this Occaſion. Juſtice to his own Honour and Truth: Who, after having denounced Miſery and Death, as the deſerved Wages of Wickedneſs, had thereby concluded all Mankind under the fatal Sentence, *in that all had ſinned*. This was a ſort of foreclоſing himſelf, from remitting the Guilt and Puniſhment, without a Satisfaction

Satisfaction made for the Offences and Outrages committed againſt him. Juſtice to his Holineſs: Which, being ſuch as cannot but hold all Iniquity in the utmoſt deteſtation, he hath thus declared, how irreconcileable his Hatred to it is, by refuſing to accept any Satisfaction, of leſs value, than that of the Blood, and bitter Sufferings, of his own Bleſſed and Co-eternal Son. Juſtice to the Authority of his own moſt righteous Laws: By repreſenting to all the World, how highly they are concerned to obey them, and what unſpeakable Torments They muſt expect, who are themſelves wilful and impenitent Offenders; ſince it coſt Him ſo dear, to redeem their Souls, who himſelf knew no Sin, but only ſuſtained the Perſon, and vouchſafed to ſtand in the place, of Sinners. Juſtice, *Laſtly*, even to the Author and Promoter of all Wickedneſs and Injuſtice, the Tempter and Deſtroyer of Souls: Who, by contriving the wrongful Death of Him, in whom he found nothing, is thus moſt equitably ejected out of all that pretended Right, which the Guilt of Human Nature might ſeem to have given him, over the polluted reſt, that partake of it. Thus, from the Inſtant of his being ſubdued by a Man, the Devil had that Prey, and thoſe Slaves, wreſted out of his Hands, in fair and open Combat which he had baſely and treacherouſly gotten, by deceiving and ſubduing Man before. Thus did it pleaſe God to proceed with this baſeſt of all Enemies; Not by a ſtretch of abſolute and arbitrary Power and Violence; but, in a Method of Judgment and Equity, overthrowing his Tyranny, and reſcuing his Captives; giving this, before wretched and conquered, Nature an Opportunity of retrieving, in the *Second Adam*, what it had loſt in the *Firſt*; and carrying the Influence of Chriſt's Righteouſneſs, as far as that of our Firſt Parent's Trangreſſion. Moſt juſtly: In regard Each was the Repreſentative of all Mankind. As therefore the Guilt and Puniſhment of the Former deſcends upon the whole Offſpring, who by a Natural and Carnal Birth were

Leo in Nativ. Dom. Ser. 2. Iren. adv. Hær. L. iii. C. 20, 33. Theodoret. Dial. 2.

were in Him: So does the Obedience of the Latter, upon as many, as are related to, and conformed with the Likeneſs of, Chriſt, and ſo are in Him too by a Second and Spiritual Birth. All which contributes, more than can be expreſſed or imagined, to the magnifying Another of the Divine Excellencies, which we cannot think at all, and not obſerve the particular Glories of, and (if ſuch Compariſons between the Perſons of God be allowable) its eminency above all the reſt, in the Contrivance of this Myſtery. I mean

4. *Fourthly*, His Goodneſs and Mercy. Of which I muſt ſay, as lately of his Power, that through every Event, each Deſign and Act of Providence, be ſo many freſh Inſtances of it, yet never was there Any fit to be named, Any did I ſay? No, not All taken together, are worthy to be put into the Balance, with This before us. It was indeed the Effect of Infinite Goodneſs, that the World was made in ſuch wonderful Beauty and Order; but how much of the Benefit, intended by this Creation, had been loſt; if, when Sin had brought in Mortality and Miſery, one of its chiefeſt Inhabitants, to whoſe Comfort and Convenience ſo many Parts of it were deſigned to miniſter, had been left to periſh; If he muſt find his State in this Dwelling, converted into not only a diſmal black Scene of preſent and grievous, but a certain Paſſage to eternal and unſpeakably more grievous, Sufferings and Sorrows? Let the Men of Metaphyſicks argue as they pleaſe, from Topicks of mere Nature; Yet ſure no Man of Senſe, who believes Revealed Religion, can ſo refine and abſtract his Notions, as not to ſuppoſe it infinitely better for Mankind never to have been at all, than to have been upon ſuch Terms as theſe. Our Creation therefore, as Matters quickly ſtood with us, was a Bleſſing in no Degree comparable to our Redemption: Our ſecond, and ſo much better Creation. It deſerves alſo to be acknowledged as a diſtinguiſhing Mark of the Divine Favour, that We ſhould be at firſt created in the Likeneſs of God; but, what Proportion is there between That, and

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the reſtoring to Us that Likeneſs, when moſt unhappily loſt, by a Kindneſs ſo amazing, as that of God being made in the Likeneſs of Man? That he ſhould put on Our Paſſions and Frailties, that we might riſe to his Perfections; ſubject himſelf to our Neceſſities and Wants, that we might receive of his Fulneſs; promote us to Honour, by ſuffering Indignities; and open to us a way to Happineſs, and Life, and a Kingdom everlaſting, by a Life of Afflictions, a Death of exquiſite Torture, and the voluntary Scandal of an Ignominious Croſs! That all this ſhould be done for Creatures, who, as ſuch, could add nothing to their Creator's Honour; for Sinners, who, as ſuch, had done their utmoſt to diſhonour him; for Rebels and Traitors, falſe to all their Obligations of Duty, unthankful to their Only Benefactor, diſloyal to the beſt of Lords, and wilful Deſtroyers of their ownſelves; Wretches, who had deſerved the hotteſt of his Indignation, and the moſt dire effects of his Hatred irreconcileable! In ſhort, This is a Subject, which the farther we enter into the Conſideration of, the leſs we ſhall find ourſelves able to ſpeak of as we ought. It is a Bleſſing better felt, than expreſſed. For, though its Copiouſneſs be ſuch, as to furniſh Matter for endleſs Enlargement, yet to Them, who have attained to any tolerable Senſe of *What*, *For Whom*, and eſpecially *By Whom*, this Miracle of Mercy hath been wrought, it will be regarded as a Myſtery of Love, for which the Tongues of Men and Angels are inſufficient. A Myſtery, which none but He, who wrought, can fully know, and a nearer and more diſtinct View whereof is reſerved for one principal Ingredient of that happy State hereafter, which it was intended to advance us to.

How then ought We to approach our New-born Saviour, and What is the Welcome, proper to be given to the Returns of this moſt happy Day? The Day, that begat us to Life Immortal, The Birth-Day of our Happineſs, and all our Hopes: The Day, that brought *Light to them that ſat in Darkneſs*, Comfort

to them who lay grovelling in Deſpair, Mercy to the Penitent, and Pardon to the Condemned?

1. Surely we ſhould now endeavour to raiſe our Souls, by a moſt ſtrong and lively Faith in the Promiſes of the Goſpel. For, how glorious ſoever theſe may be, or how unworthy of them ſoever our ſinful ſelves; yet can they not poſſibly be ſo far above our Meanneſs, as that Human Nature, taken to aſſure them to us, is below the Majeſty of the God, who took it. Well may we then cry out with the Pſalmiſt, *Lord, what is Man that thou makeſt ſuch account of him, or the Son of Man that thou ſhouldſt* in ſo amazing a manner vouchſafe to *viſit him?* Since therefore that hath been done already, which ſo far exceeds the utmoſt we durſt hope, all we could aſk or think; what is there, can there be, yet behind, which, we have reaſon to fear, God will eſteem too good for us? Or, how *ſhall he not freely give us all things*, who hath loved us ſo tenderly, as *not to ſpare his own Son, but give* the moſt precious of all Gifts *for us?*

Pſal. cxliv. 3.

Rom. viii. 32.

2. Surely we are of all Creatures moſt ſtupid and cold, if we do not, this Day eſpecially, feel our Hearts inflamed with a moſt ardent Love. A Love, that ſhall carry us entirely to the Object, ſo highly deſerving it; and diſpoſe us to deſpiſe and hate every thing, in Compariſon of him, who hath ſet us this unparalleled Example of Kindneſs. A Love, that ſhall think no return of Service or Hardſhips grievous; but chearfully ſacrifice every darling Luſt, conſecrate every Affection of our Souls, devote every action of our Lives, nay even thoſe Lives themſelves, if need require, to Him. To Him, Who, to make us all his own, doubly his own, after having made us, did not diſdain to be made, and born, and live, as one of us; purely that he might be capable of dying to redeem us.

3. Surely we are not the Diſciples of Him, whoſe Birth we celebrate, if our Charity to Men be not likewiſe as ſincere, as univerſal, as our Love to this God and Saviour, is fervent and entire. For, how ſhall we

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dare to exclude thoſe, whom God hath not excluded? How deny our Prayers and good Wiſhes, our beſt Endeavours and kindeſt Offices, where He hath extended his Mercy, in the higheſt Inſtant, that He was capable of ſhewing, or They of receiving it? Are They Strangers and Aliens? He hath united us all to each other; and, from the Inſtance of God and Man becoming one Perſon, hath made all Mankind one Body in himſelf. Are they Enemies, who have provoked and unjuſtly offended us? Such, and much worſe, were every One of Us, when we were reconciled and ſaved by this wonderful Love. A Love, whoſe peculiar *Commendation* it is, that *while we were yet Enemies, Chriſt* was not only born, but *died for us*. Are They Inferiors, and look'd upon as not worth our Concern? That, above all Objections, ought, on this Day however, to be ſilent.

Rom. v. 8.

4. For, ſurely we are obliged on This, above all other Days, to be poſſeſs'd with the profoundeſt Humility. A Grace, at leaſt as proper to the Seaſon, as any hitherto inſiſted on. For never was Vanity and Pride ſo put out of Countenance, as by *God taking upon him the form of a Servant*. Never the Pomp and Grandeur of the World ſo vilified, as by the Lord of Heaven and Earth condeſcending to make his Entry in ſo poor a Figure, and, from a Throne of Glory, ſtooping down *to Swadling Clothes and a Manger*. Never the Splendor and Magnificence of Courts, and numerous Trains, and noble Retinue, ſet in a truer Light, than by the King of Kings, contenting himſelf with the Miniſtry of his meek Mother, and chuſing to receive the firſt Reſpects, and have his firſt Preſence compoſed of a few humble Shepherds. Never was the true Uſe of Power more nicely taught, nor the cold Neglects, the haughty Arrogance, and inſolent Abuſes, it is apt to tempt Men to, more effectually reproached; than by this Proof, that God was then ſtrongeſt, when he put on the greateſt Appearance of Weakneſs; And, that the Princes, and Great Ones of this World, are then moſt

Phil. ii. 7.

moſt truly great, moſt like their glorious Original above; when they think no Condeſcenſion below them for a general Good; when they do not look down from on high with Diſdain, upon the pooreſt, the meaneſt, thoſe who leaſt deſerve, at the ſame time that they moſt need, their Pity and Relief. And, Who indeed can ſcorn and neglect the vileſt of his Fellow-creatures, when provoked by ſuch a Pattern of Condeſcenſion before his Eyes? For, let the diſtance be as wide, as Fortune, or Station, or Birth, or even Imagination can make it; ſtill can it carry no manner of Proportion between Creator and Creature, God and Man. And let the kind Office, or the Love to be exerciſed, be magnified never ſo much; ſtill all is nothing, in Compariſon of that God not *abhorring the Womb of the Virgin*, and, that *he might deliver Man* from Miſery, ſubmitting to be made Man, and to endure the ſame Affliction, with thoſe, whom he took upon him to deliver. Faith then, and Love of God, univerſal Charity, and unaffected Humility, are the pious Diſpoſitions ſuited to this Occaſion. Such are the Graces, ſuch the Ornaments with which every Soul ſhall be deck'd in this Feſtival of Peace and Love. And Ye, whoſe truly Chriſtian Spirits have thus put on Chriſt, Come forth, and prepare to meet your God in the kind Approaches he makes towards you. Meet him firſt in your Cloſets, with fervent Devotion and Heavenly Meditations. And, when theſe more retired Exerciſes of Piety have wrought your Souls up to a holy Warmth; *Go your way into his Gates with Thankſgiving, and into his Courts with Praiſe*; There fan and cheriſh the holy Flame your private Thoughts have kindled, by a zealous joining in the Prayers of the Church; By hearkening to the Story of this Birth, and all its Circumſtances, with fixed Attention and Holy Wonder; By carefully improving thoſe ſacred Truths, which the Man of God ſhall find ſeaſonable to be now inculcated: But above all, by feeding, and feaſting upon, the Figures of that Fleſh, which God, as at this time, clothed himſelf with for Your ſakes; By dedicating to Him, in a moſt ſolemn

Manner, every Faculty and part of that Nature, which he not only came to ſatisfy for, but to ſanctify; and hath acquired a full Right to, by this ſtupendious Union with his own. When this is done, Let no profane or worldly Thoughts preſume to mingle themſelves with your religious ones; But give a Truce to Buſineſs and Care, to Grief, and every diſorderly and melancholy Paſſion; And let this whole Day be ſacred to Quiet and Calmneſs of Mind, to ſpiritual Comforts and uninterrupted Joy: Joys, in which your Bodies may very decently partake too, by a more liberal Proviſion than ordinary of thoſe good Creatures, you are bleſs'd with for their Suſtenance and Refreſhment. But take good heed, that this Liberality degenerate not into Luxury and Riot. And now, leaſt of any time, be guilty of diſhonouring that Body, which the God of all Holineſs and Purity vouchſafed to appear in the Likeneſs of. No, let your Plenty be made a Virtue, by opening your Hearts and Hands wide, to the Neceſſities of thoſe Naked and Hungry, for whom, as well as for You, this Saviour was born. So far as in you lies, let there be no ſign of Want, no Crying or Complaining in your Streets, to pollute the Rejoicings of that Bleſſed Day, when the Lord of all began *to be made poor, that we through his Poverty might be made rich.* Let no Voice now be heard, but that of Pſalms, and Hymns, and Hearts making Melody to the Lord. With ſuch the Angels brought him into the Body. Nor can we think it ſtrange, that They who conceive a freſh Joy at the Converſion of a ſingle Sinner, ſhould now publiſh their general Joy, at the Salvation of a whole World ſet on Foot. But ſtrange it may very well be thought, if Angels ſhould ſing, and Men ſhould be ſilent upon this Occaſion; if They ſhould even overflow with Gladneſs at the Happineſs of Others, and we ſhould expreſs no feeling of our Own. Once more, and to conclude all, Remember, that the Calves of your Lips, even when moſt devoutly offered, are not a ſufficient Sacrifice; but, as this Day was to Jeſus, ſo let it be to You, the beginning of a new Life.

Life. Remember, He was made the Son of Man, to make us the Sons of God; that none can receive the Benefit of His being the Former, who do not Themſelves become the latter: And that none are the Sons of God, any farther, than they make it their Buſineſs to be *holy as their Heavenly Father is Holy.* In vain, alas! was this Divine Babe born into the World, except he be likewiſe born in Our Hearts. In vain did I ſay? Nay good were it for us, that he had never been born, if we do not live up to the Light this Word hath ſhed abroad, and follow the Example this *Word made Fleſh* hath left us. Of ſuch mighty Importance, ſuch abſolute Neceſſity, it is, that we ſhould aſpire to his likeneſs, who hath ſo graciouſly condeſcended to Ours; And, *being made God's Children by Adoption and Grace, ſhould,* not this Day only, but every Day, be *renewed by his Holy Spirit.* A Bleſſing, which, as we are taught to aſk in the ſolemn Devotions of this Morning, ſo ſhall we not fail to receive, if this Feſtival, and the Joys of it, be rightly improved, to the Honour of Him, who in marvellous Compaſſion to poor loſt Man, came *as at this time* into his own World, *and took our Nature upon him:* Even Jeſus Chriſt, the eternal and *only begotten Son of God,* the wonderful *Son of a pure Virgin*; To whom with the Father and Holy Spirit, ever one God, be all Glory and Thankſgiving, Adoration and Obedience, World without End.

St. Stephen's *Day.*

The COLLECT.

GRant, O Lord, that in all our Sufferings here upon earth, for the teſtimony of thy truth, we may ſtedfaſtly look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory that ſhall be revealed; and being filled with the Holy Ghoſt, may learn to love and bleſs our perſecutors, by the example of thy firſt Martyr St. *Stephen,* who prayed for his murderers to thee, O Bleſſed Jeſus, who ſtandeſt at the right hand of God, to ſuccour all thoſe that ſuffer for thee, our only Mediator and Advocate. *Amen.*

Acts vii. 55. 60. 56.

Acts vii. 55.

IN order to a clear Underſtanding, and due Improvement, of the Portion of Scripture appointed for this Feſtival; it will be expedient to premiſe ſomewhat, concerning the Occaſion of it in particular, and the Perſon, whoſe Martyrdom it relates, and the Church enjoins us to commemorate.

The Author of the Book of *Acts* takes notice, in his *Second* and *Fourth* Chapters, that, among other Teſtimonies of the Unanimity and Charity of the firſt Chriſtians, this was very remarkable; that they voluntarily parted with their Property, and, to ſupply the preſent Neceſſities of the Church, brought their Subſtance into one common Bank; Out of which Diſtribution was made, according to the needs of each Believer. The Difficulty of making this Diſtribution, to every one's Content, would naturally increaſe, with the Numbers of the Parties concerned to receive it. This proved to be ſoon the Caſe, when Converts of ſeveral ſorts came in. The *Grecians* (ſuch by Birth but Proſelytes to Judaiſm, (as ſome think) Or, (as Others) *Jews* by Deſcent, but of the *Diſperſion:* (as they are elſewhere called) and ſo uſing, not the *Syriack*, but the *Greek* Language in their Synagogues) thought an undue Preference given to the *Hebrew* Widows; and Their Complaints firſt miniſtered Occaſion to that Order in the Church, which hath ever ſince continued, under the Title of *Deacons*.

Acts ii. 44, 55. iv. 34, 35.

Pearſon Poſth. Lect. 1. v. p. 52.

John vii. 35.

The End then which the Apoſtles chiefly had in view, at the firſt Inſtitution of this Order, was to appoint proper Perſons, to aſſiſt them in the Affairs of the Church. Particularly in the Care of the Poor: Which now grew a Burden too heavy for a few; And eſpecially for thoſe, who had Matters of greater Importance upon their Hands, from which,

Acts vi. 2, 3, 4.

which, it was not fit, This ſhould be ſuffered to divert them. How far the Commiſſion, then given to theſe Perſons, extended, as to the Performance of Holy Offices, is beſide the Deſign of this Treatiſe to diſpute. It ſhall ſuffice to obſerve, that we have, in the *Eighth* Chapter of this Book, an Account of One of them, both Preaching, and Baptizing, in the Abſence of the Apoſtles. The Care taken in their Qualifications for this Office, ſpeaks it to have been eſteemed of great Importance to Religion; and Many are of Opinion, that thoſe, who were now choſen into it, were of the Number of our Lord's Seventy Diſciples.

Ch. viii. 5, 12, 35, 38.

Chap. vi. 3.

Pearſon ubi ſupra.

Among Theſe the Firſt was the Saint of this Day. Whoſe Zeal for the Faith inflamed the Envy of its Adverſaries, and engaged him in warm Diſputes, with the Members of the Synagogues then at *Jeruſalem*. Theſe were not only Places of Publick Worſhip, but a ſort of Colleges and Schools, where Men were inſtructed in the Law and Traditions of the *Jews*. Who, being now diſperſed in ſeveral Foreign Parts, had Synagogues peculiar to their reſpective Countries, in which the Youth of ſuch a Diſtrict were educated. Five of theſe Synagogues attack St. *Stephen* at once. Who, finding themſelves unable to vanquiſh him in Controverſy, dealt with Men of profligate Conſciences, to accuſe him of Blaſphemy; and then, in a tumultuous manner, they bring him before the Council, in order to obtain a formal Sentence of Condemnation againſt him.

The Matter brought in Charge, and that returned to it in his own Defence, give us fair Intimation, what was the Subject in Diſpute between St. *Stephen* and the Members of thoſe Synagogues, who contended with him. The Arguments, uſed by Him, againſt the perpetual Obligation, and Neceſſity of the *Moſaick* Inſtitution, the Accuſers aggravate, by repreſenting them, as blaſphemous Words

Ch. vi. 11.

againſt *Moſes* and againſt God. And the Charge he had brought againſt the Crucifiers of our Saviour, the Vengeance he threatened them with for that Sin, and the Exhortations to ſubmit to the Goſpel-Covenant, are, in like manner, loaded with that odious Character, of Blaſphemies againſt the Temple and the Law. For ſo they explain themſelves, and ground their Allegations upon this, Ch. vi. 14. *We heard him ſay, that this Jeſus of Nazareth ſhall deſtroy this Place, and change the Cuſtoms Moſes delivered us.*

From this Imputation of Blaſphemy St. *Stephen* vindicates himſelf, and, at the ſame time, ſupports the Arguments charged with it, by an Hiſtorical Account of the moſt memorable Actions and Events, from *Abraham* down to *Solomon*. The Deſign whereof is to ſhew, that the Law, for which they at this time expreſs'd ſo fierce a Zeal, as if no Salvation could be attained any other way, could not poſſibly be of that weighty Conſequence and abſolute Neceſſity, which they fondly imagined. And this Proof may be reduced to Three Reaſons.

(1) Becauſe (as is plain from the Hiſtory of *Abraham* and the *Patriarchs*) their Anceſtors pleaſed and continued in the Favour of God, for more than Four Hundred Years, without it. Since therefore theſe were God's Peculiar and Elect, before that Law was given; it follows, that this Law could not be the Covenant, and Diſpenſation, for ſaving Men, excluſive of all others.

Ch. vii. Ver. 2. *to* 37.

(2) Becauſe the very Prophet, at whoſe Hands they received the Law, gave them warning of Another eminent Prophet, whom God (in Ages to come) would raiſe up from among them, *like unto Him* (that is, a Lawgiver too;) and to whom every Soul among them was commanded, upon pain of utter Exciſion, to yield Attention and Obedience. Conſequently, preaching the Faith and Obedience of *Jeſus*, who was that very Prophet, could not be Blaſphemy againſt God, or *Moſes*.

Ver. 37, 38.

See Deut. xviii. 5, &c.

Moſes. Quite contrary. This had a Direct Tendency to magnify Both, by leading Men to Him, whom God had decreed, and *Moſes* had foretold, to be the Saviour of all them, and only Them, who ſhould ſubmit to be taught by, and ſtedfaſtly place their Hope and Truſt in, Him.

(3) Becauſe that Law, they now pretended ſo great Reverence for, was plainly inſufficient to contain them in their Duty. This appear'd from the frequent Relapſes into Rebellion and Idolatry, which the Prophets ſharply reproached, and threatened with ſo many ſevere Puniſhments. And, all this, notwithſtanding the Preſence of God perpetually among them, in the Tabernacle firſt, and then in the Temple; which yet they were not to ſuppoſe God ſo fond of, as to ſpare from Deſtruction, if the People's Sins called for Vengeance. And therefore, as the ancient Prophets thought it no Profanation, either of the Law, or of that Holy Place, to denounce the Abolition of the One, and demoliſhing of the Other: No more was it any in St. *Stephen*, to declare the Extirpation of the Former, and the utter Ruin of the Latter, to a Generation of Men, now ripe for Deſtruction. Such as had not only imitated, but far exceeded, the Obſtinacy, and Malice, and Barbarity of their Forefathers. All which, as this holy Man was about to ſhew, in the Proceſs of his Diſcourſe, he ſeems to have been interrupted, by the Clamour and Tumult of his Adverſaries; and thereupon raiſed to that Indignation, expreſs'd at the *Fifty-Firſt* and following Verſes. There he flies out, in Rebukes ſo ſmart and home, that the Guilty Audience, not able to endure him any longer, were carried to all the Marks of Spite, and Rage, and Fury implacable. Under which how He behaved himſelf, and what this Malice ended in, the Portion of Scripture appointed for the Epiſtle is intended to acquaint us.

Ver. 39, *to* 50.

Ver. 51 *to* 55.

The EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE. Acts vii. 55.

55. *Stephen* was ſo far from being diſcouraged at theſe Expreſſions of Rage, againſt him, that, animated with the Comforts of the Holy Spirit, he lifted up his Eyes and Heart to Heaven; and had a Viſion vouchſafed unto him, repreſenting clearly the Majeſty of God, encompaſſed with his Holy Angels; and that Jeſus, whoſe Cauſe he had pleaded, and for which he was about to die, exalted as God-Man to the ſame Majeſty, and in a Poſture of Readineſs and Power to ſuccour and receive him.

55. *STephen being full of the Holy Ghoſt, looked up ſtedfaſtly into Heaven, and ſaw the glory of God, and Jeſus ſtanding at the right hand of God,*

56. This Viſion, ſo graciouſly afforded for his Support, he boldly declares to the Aſſembly, before whom he then ſtood.

56. *And ſaid, Behold, I ſee the Heavens opened, and the Son of Man ſtanding on the right hand of God.*

57, 58. At the hearing whereof, they unanimouſly exclaimed againſt him, and by ſtopping their Ears, expreſſed their utmoſt Deteſtation of the horrible Blaſphemy they pretended him guilty of, in affirming a Man, whom he confeſſed to have been lately put to Death, now to be glorified, and to reign with God in Heaven. And, looking upon his own Words, as a ſufficient Confirmation of the Crimes before alledged againſt him: They gave a looſe to their Zeal, dragged him with Violence out of their City, (as was uſual in the Execution of impious Malefactors) and went to inflict on him the Death, preſcribed in the Law, for Blaſphemers and Seducers to Idolatry. Which, that they might do with more Expedition and Dexterity, the Witneſſes, who by the Law were to have the firſt Hand in the Execution (a Ceremony importing the Truth of their Teſtimony, and a taking upon themſelves the Guilt of the Blood ſhed thereupon, in Caſe it were falſe; and therefore wiſely ordained to make Men very cautious what they depoſed in Evidence) ſtripp'd, and committed their Clothes to the Cuſtody of a young Man (afterwards a zealous Preacher, but now a bitter Perſecutor of the Chriſtian Faith) called *Saul*; who thus declared

57. *Then they cried out with a loud Voice, and ſtopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,*

58. *And caſt him out of the city, and ſtoned him: and the witneſſes laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whoſe name was Saul.*

declared his Consent, and Concurrence in that wicked and bloody Fact.

59. *And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus receive my Spirit.*

59. Then the Witnesses first, and afterwards the People, cast Stones at this good Man, who, in the mean time, continued to express the greatness of his Faith in that Saviour for whom he suffered, by commending to his Care and Custody that Soul, which though now about to be separated from, yet he knew very well should not die with his Body.

60. *And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this Sin to their charge. And when he had said this he fell asleep.*

60. Nor was his Charity less exemplary and wonderful, than his Faith. For he did, in most devout manner, beseech God, not to charge this Sin to the Account of them that slew him. And with these Words in his Mouth this First Martyr died. A Death, which, in regard of the Meekness and Composure of Mind he underwent it with, as well as the Certainty of his Resurrection to a better Life, is rather to be called a Sleep, in which the Body lies down to rest a while, till it shall please God to awaken and unite it again to that Soul which had put it off, and which in the mean time lives and acts in a separate State of Bliss, prepared for the Spirits of good Men.

The Time of this Martyrdom is by some * placed after our Lord's Death, about Eight Months, † by Others at the Distance of about Four, by Others again Seven ‖ Years. *Eusebius* is express,* that it follow'd quickly after his Election into the Office of Deacon; and from St. *Chrysostom*, and some Others who speak in his Honour, we are to conclude, that he was martyr'd young. The Scripture acquaints us farther, that his Body, was interred with Solemnity, and such Lamentation, as was proper for one, whose Labours the Church lost, though she gained by his Example. The Place where he suffered, is said to have a stately Church built upon it by *Eudocia* the Empress, Wife to *Theodosius*.

* Usser. Ann. Vet. & Nov. Test ad Ann. Christ. 34. Pearson Annal. Paulin. p. 1.
† Le Sucur. ad Ann. 38.
‖ Evod. apud Niceph. l. 2. c. 3.
* Hist. Eccl. l. 2. c. 1.

Evagr. Hist. Eccl. l. 1. c. 2.

COM-

COMMENT *on the Portion of Scripture for the Epiſtle.*

FROM celebrating the Glories of God clothing himſelf with a Body of Fleſh, we paſs to the Reſpects due to the Leader of that noble Army, who willingly unclothed themſelves, and put off this Body, for the Teſtimony of *Jeſus*. Yeſterday ſhewed us the Heavens opened, for Angels to ſing forth the Praiſes of the Son of God deſcending from thence; To-day the ſame Heavens open, to diſcover the Son of Man *ſtanding at the right hand of God*, and ſtepping forward, as it were, to take up thither a Spirit, not only commended to him, but offering its mortal Attendant as a Sacrifice, the Firſt Sacrifice, for his Truth. In the Circumſtances of which Heroick Action, deſcribed by St. *Luke*, as you have heard, 'tis eaſy to obſerve a great Variety of Matter; all conducing very much, to the Honour of that Saint we now remember, and to the Edification of every pious Chriſtian, who ſhall ſet himſelf ſeriouſly to conſider and remember him as he ought.

As *Firſt*, We have here the great Mercy and Goodneſs of God, in vouchſafing to St. *Stephen* ſuch extraordinary Meaſures of his Grace, ſuch a comfortable and raviſhing Proſpect of the Glories of Heaven, to ſuſtain and fortify him, in the Conflicts of his approaching Death, for the Sake of his Bleſſed Son. And this is contained in the 55th and 56th Verſes.

Secondly, We have likewiſe the Stedfaſtneſs and Vigour of St. *Stephen*'s Faith, in committing his Soul to *Jeſus*, at his laſt Minutes. An Action, which does evidently imply a firm Belief, (1.) That his Soul was a Subſtance diſtinct from his Body; (2.) That it ſhould not die with, but continue to exiſt when ſeparated from the Body; (3.) That the ſame *Jeſus*, whom he had acknowledged to be very Man, is likewiſe very God: One able to hear and grant this Prayer, and to preſerve the Souls commended to his Pro-

Ver. 59.

Protection and Care. And, (4.) That the Spirits received by Him, are in a State of Safety and Happiness.

Thirdly, Here is an admirable Pattern of Meekness and Charity; Of tender Compassion for Them, who have none for Us; and of forgiving our bittereſt and moſt bloody Enemies; even then, when, if ever, our angry Reſentments might ſeem allowable. For all this is the Reſult of St. *Stephen*'s praying, that the Guilt of his Death might not be charged to the Men, who moſt wrongfully inflicted it: Doing this, at the very Inſtant of their executing their Malice, and adding to his Agonies; And perſevering in this invincible Charity to his laſt Breath, as if God's Mercy to theſe hardened Wretches were the thing, which, of all others, he was moſt concerned to implore, with the dying Accents of a Tongue to ſpeak no more. Thus not only imitating that Bleſſed Lord, for whom he was content to be ſo barbarouſly murdered; but, by his Example, confirming the Truth of St. *Paul*'s Aſſertion, that, *though a Man have all Faith, ſo that he could remove Mountains, and though he give his Body to be burned, and have not Charity, it profiteth him nothing.*

Ver. 60.

1 Cor. xiii. 2, 3.

It is not neceſſary to add more Reflections, though more there be, which this Portion of Scripture might ſuggeſt to us. Nor ſhall I enlarge upon the Two laſt of Theſe, but reſerve thoſe Conſiderations to another Place; where we ſhall have Occaſion to obſerve the ſame Actions, in a greater than St. *Stephen*. So that my Diſcourſe at preſent ſhall confine itſelf to the *Firſt* Head.

Goſpel for Thurſday *before* Eaſter.

The great Mercy, I mean, and Goodneſs of God, in vouchſafing to this Martyr, in his laſt Conflicts, ſuch extraordinary Meaſures of his Grace, and ſo comfortable a Proſpect of the Glories of Heaven. *Stephen full of the Holy Ghoſt*, &c.

Ver. 55, 56.

And here I ſhall apply myſelf to conſider Two Things.

Firſt,

First, The Nature and the Seaſonableneſs of the Supports, ſaid here to be afforded St. *Stephen*, upon this Occaſion.

Secondly, What Concluſions we may be allowed to make from this Example, for our own Comfort and Encouragement, under any Sufferings and Dangers, which the Providence of God ſhall think fit to engage us in; More particularly, upon the Approach of Death.

1. Let us obſerve, in the *Firſt* Place, the Nature and the Seaſonableneſs of the Supports afforded St. *Stephen* upon this Occaſion. And of theſe we find Two expreſly mentioned. The Fulneſs of the Holy Ghoſt then upon his Mind; And the View of God's Glory, and of Jeſus ſtanding at his Right Hand in Heaven.

1. *Firſt*, Particular Notice is taken of *Stephen* being at this time *full of the Holy Ghoſt*. The Character given of him, when firſt mentioned in this Hiſtory, is, That he was a Man *full of Faith and of the Holy Ghoſt*. Which what it means is eaſy to learn from another Paſſage quickly after, where we read that *Stephen full of Faith and Power, did great Wonders and Miracles among the People*. Theſe Texts compared together, ſhew, that the Holy Ghoſt, there ſpoken of, denotes thoſe extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit, which enabled this Holy Man to awaken and convince Unbelievers, by thoſe wonderful Operations, confirming the Truth of his Doctrine. And this our Lord hath taught us, was a Privilege, not always confined to Perſons of Sincerity and eminent Piety. But by the Holy Ghoſt in the Paſſage now before us, I take another ſort of Gifts to be meant. Such Virtues and Graces, as were proper for, and ſhined forth with ſo bright a Luſtre in, St. *Stephen*'s preſent Circumſtances. Such unſeen, and yet ſuch mighty, Peace, and inward Joy, as, with regard to the Perſecutions and Troubles of his ſuffering Servants, might move our Lord, moſt fitly to promiſe this Spirit, in the Stile and

Acts vi. 5.

Ver. 8.

Matth. vii. 22.

John xiv, xv, xvi.

and Title of a *Comforter*. Such eager Zeal and undaunted Courage, to do and ſuffer all Things for Chriſt and his Truth; as ſhould baffle all thoſe Weakneſſes or Inclinations of Nature, which diſpoſe us to be too tenderly affected, with the Eaſe and Comforts of the Life we now lead. Such Heavenly-mindedneſs, as fixes all our Hopes, and directs all our Aims, ſo as to center in the Rewards reſerved for a future State, and makes every Affliction look light and little in our Eyes: So far from being to be dreaded or declined, as rather to be embraced and choſen, delighted and triumphed in, upon the Account of that *eternal Weight of Glory which this worketh out for us*. Such Love of God, as eſteems it a Bleſſedneſs to be Sacrificed for his Honour. Such Love of our Brethren, as grudges no Pain or Expence, that may contribute to the Salvation of their Souls. Such Love of our Enemies, as returns Good Will for Hatred, Prayers for Perſecutions, Meekneſs for Malice; and is in all Points conformable to Him, *who, when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he ſuffered threatened not, but committed his Soul to Him that judgeth righteouſly; and hath herein left us an Example, that we ſhould follow his Steps*. Theſe Diſpoſitions make up a Frame and Temper of Mind, ſo different from the Tendencies of Human Nature, as the Caſe now ſtands with it; ſo far ſuperior to any thing, that the Principles of mere Reaſon could ſuggeſt; that, whereſoever we ſee them, we may be confident, they came down from above; and are entirely owing to a Power and Wiſdom, that aſſiſts and directs, raiſes and refines, influences and over-rules, our natural Powers. Experience and Obſervation both aſſure us, that very liberal Meaſures of theſe ſupernatural Helps are neceſſary, to produce ſuch ſhining Perfections. And therefore though the Communication of theſe Helps had been large, and the force of them very conſpicuous, in the other Parts of St. *Stephen*'s Conduct; yet they ſeem to have been much more plentifully ſhed upon him,

2 Cor. iv. 17.

1 Pet. ii. 21, 22, 23.

him, in this laſt Act of his Life. So plentifully, that, (as if the Frailties of a Mortal were quite abſorp'd, and he had no Motions left in his Soul, but ſuch as were thus inſpired) he is for that Reaſon very ſignificantly ſaid to be *full of the Holy Ghoſt.*

Nor was the Goodneſs of God more remarkable, in the Degree of theſe Aſſiſtances, than in the Time, made choice of for imparting them. For what Circumſtances is it poſſible to form to our own Imagination, that could ſtand more in need of them, than thoſe, in which St. *Stephen* was at preſent? He had been exerciſed with perpetual Oppoſition, ever ſince (we are ſure, and probably before) his Election into the Miniſtry of the Church: Attacked by Men of Principles, that are generally implacable. For ſuch are blind Zeal, and Worldly Intereſt. Each of them hard, when ſingle, but Both in Conjunction, almoſt impoſſible to be brought to Reaſon. His Enemies, enraged with the diſcredit of being defeated by him in their publick Diſputations; Wretches of a Conſcience ſo profligate, that to retrieve their own Repute, and rid their Hands of ſo troubleſome, becauſe ſo powerful, an Adverſary; they had ſuborned falſe Witneſſes, and brought him before the Council and High Prieſt, only to put the better Face on the bloody Deſign, and, that they might murder in Form of Law. His Vindication from their Calumnies had been ſo far from ſoftening, that it did but the more exaſperate; inſomuch, that being now loſt to all Temper, and all Decency, they, inſtead of replying, *gnaſhed upon him with their Teeth.* A Geſture that ſpeaks the Extremity of Anger and Fury ungovernable, of unrelenting Cruelty, and Envy, and Spite.

Chap. vi. 10.

It was eaſy to diſcern, whither all this Rancour would grow; and neceſſary, that the direſt Effects of it ſhould be borne, with a Magnanimity and Meekneſs, that might adorn, and demonſtrate, the Power of that Doctrine, for which St. *Stephen* ſuffered. And, ſince the Perſon called to ſuffer for it, was of the ſame Infirmi-

firmities and Paſſions, the ſame natural Averſions to Pain and Death with common Men; God was graciouſly pleaſed to conquer theſe Reluctances, and ſtrengthen thoſe Weakneſſes, by a Grace that roſe in Proportion to thoſe Overflowings of Ungodlineſs, whoſe impetuous Torrent was to be ſtem'd by it. Again, Since every Act of Chriſtian Obedience is ſuppoſed and required to proceed upon rational Principles; Since that of dying for Religion, the laſt and higheſt Inſtance of it, ought to do ſo too, at leaſt as much as any; thereby to diſtinguiſh itſelf from Humour, and Hardineſs, and Folly; and, ſince it could not be rational for a Man voluntarily to diveſt himſelf of a Good in Poſſeſſion, except by way of Exchange for ſome greater Good in Reverſion; It follows, that nothing can ſo much contribute to a Man's ſuffering cheerfully for a Good Cauſe, as the aſſured Expectation of a Reward upon that Account, which will abundantly compenſate all that he can poſſibly endure. But now, becauſe things engage our Affections, and move our Deſires, not in Proportion to what they are in their own Nature, but according to the Apprehenſions we have of them; upon this Champion's entering the Liſts with Malice, and Violence, and Death, it pleaſed God to grant him a

2. *Second* Support contained in thoſe Words, which relate of St. *Stephen*, that *he looked up ſtedfaſtly into Heaven, and ſaw the Glory of God, and Jeſus ſtanding on the right hand of God.* Matth. iii. Luke iii. John i. Whether this opening of the Heavens were real, and ſuch, as is generally believed to have been at our Lord's Baptiſm in *Jordan*; Or whether this, like ſeveral Appearances to the Prophets of the Old Teſtament, were repreſented to St. *Stephen*, by way of Viſion; As we cannot certainly know, ſo is it of no great Conſequence, that we ſhould. For, in regard a Viſion is deſcribed, by Them, who are particularly curious in theſe Matters, to be ſuch a *diſtinct and ſtrong Impreſſion upon the* Faculty of Imagination, as ſets the Object be- Maim. Mor. Nev. P. ii. C. 36.

fore

fore *the Man, as plainly as if it actually were present, and perceived by his bodily Senses*; it is out of Queſtion, that Either of theſe Ways comes all to one, as to the Certainty of Perſuaſion, and every other Effect, which we can ſuppoſe it intended to produce, in the Mind of the Party acted upon by it. And therefore, beſides the Operations of the Holy Ghoſt already mentioned, I make no doubt, but One was, to aſſure St. *Stephen*, that he was under no Deluſion in this Caſe, but influenced and enlightened by God, who thus opened his Eyes, by an extraordinary Grace. And, as in other Inſtances, the Heavens are deſcribed to open, and the Spirit ſaid to enter into Men, and They to be in the Spirit, and the like; So He is here ſaid to be full of the Holy Ghoſt, and to ſee the Heavens opened, when theſe Diſcoveries were made; And that, in a manner lively and clear, which no natural Powers of the brighteſt and moſt penetrating Mind could ever have attained to.

Ezek. i. 1. ii. 2. iii. 14. xi. 24. Rev. i. 10.

Such were the Diſcoveries, in the Caſe now under Conſideration; The Majeſty of God, ſurrounded with Light, to which no Mortal can Approach, attended with a numerous Retinue of Angels; The Perſon of *Jeſus*, inveſted with Power and Dominion; and that Human Nature, which had of late been ſo ignominiouſly treated, that Body which expired upon a Croſs, now placed in Honour at the Right Hand of his Father, and giving Law to all thoſe Heavenly Powers, than whom he had a little while ſubmitted to be lower. Theſe Proſpects of thoſe Bliſsful Regions, gave this Martyr a clear Sight and Sweet Foretaſte of the Joys and Glories reſerved for all Them, who ſhall be ever with their deareſt Lord. Theſe I conceive to be the Objects and Ingredients, that made up St. *Stephen*'s Viſion. The Nature whereof being thus explained, it remains only, that I obſerve the Seaſonableneſs of this Mercy to him, to finiſh my firſt Head of Diſcourſe.

To this Purpoſe let us conſider, of what Uſe this was,

or

or might have been, for the Conviction of Others, and of what it certainly was to St. *Stephen* himself.

1. It certainly was, or might have been of great Use, for the Conviction of Others. And for that Reason, no doubt, St. *Stephen* immediately declared it to the Assembly. Which, consisting principally of Persons learned in the Law, and History, and altogether, as is most probable, of Men making Profession, of the *Jewish* Religion, ought to have been restrained from their intended Mischief, and turned their Thoughts to another sort of Considerations. They were not ignorant, that such glorious Appearances of the Divine Majesty had been frequent under the Old Testament; and that such Marks of God's especial Presence were Marks of Kindness and Distinction; that he did not use to be so particular in the Manifestations of himself, except to those, who were as particularly acceptable to Him, and very highly in his Favour. So that, to Persons educated in, and possessed of, these Notions, it is not easy to conceive, what more Authentick Testimony could be given, of St. *Stephen*'s Innocence, or the Truth of all he preached, and of his Conduct and his Cause being approved and espoused above.

But That, which ought yet more effectually to have proved all this to them, was the Other Part of St. *Stephen*'s Vision, wherein *Jesus* was represented *standing at the right hand of God.* Such an Exaltation of Him, whom they had so lately persecuted in his own Person, and now continued to persecute in his Members, declared most evidently the Divine Love and Favour, not only to that Saviour, who had suffered such Indignities, while himself was upon Earth; but to all those, who should afterwards suffer for His Sake, and after His Example, to whose Righteousness the Father had given the unparallel'd Attestation, of seating his Human Nature upon his own Throne in Heaven. And yet this very Circumstance did, above all the rest, inflame the Malice, and sharpen the Envy of the *Jews.* So blind were they to all those Evidences for the Truth, which, if admitted,

muſt have produced a Self-condemnation for all their Prejudices and former wicked Practices. So hard it is to bring habitual Sinners, to forſake and retract the Errors and Vices, to which they have been uſed to abandon themſelves. So far are thoſe Means of Converſion, which, in their own Nature, are fit and ſufficient, from proving efficacious and ſucceſsful in the Event. Such is the Miſery of thoſe wretched Men, whom God, in the Juſtice of his Judgments, delivers over to a reprobate Senſe, by drawing down upon their own Heads the Prophet's Curſe in its moſt fatal Meaning; making the *things which ſhould have been for their Wealth an Occaſion of falling* deeper and more deſperately. For, What elſe did theſe enraged Zealots, when, inſtead of being awed, or in any degree reſtrained, by the manifeſtation of this Glory, they made his publiſhing the mighty Favour a freſh, and more unpardonable Provocation to murder him? What did they but extract Poiſon out of the richeſt Antidotes, and render the moſt Sovereign Remedies the moſt incurable Aggravation of their Diſeaſe.

Pſal. lxix. 22.

2. In the mean while, the wonderful Effects of this Mercy are no leſs conſpicuous, upon a Mind rightly prepared to improve by it. For, Who can expreſs the Comfort, the Joy, that St. *Stephen* muſt needs have conceived, upon ſuch a glorious Scene opening before his Eyes? When Death, in its moſt terrible Form, drew up to him, and Rage and Violence were ſwallowing him up; what could ſo powerfully ſupport Human Nature, under the Fears and Weakneſſes, which, in ſuch critical Junctures, it is leaſt able to get above? What looſen all thoſe Bands, which are apt to faſten us down to things preſent, and agreeable to the Appetites which we now carry about, and are perpetually acted upon by; like a ſenſible Demonſtration of the infinitely more deſirable State, awaiting every Diſciple of that Maſter, who dares to truſt and ſo far take his Word, as to chuſe the loſing his Life, for the true Method of ſaving it? What Vigour and Strength muſt

it inſpire into this noble Champion for the Truth, what Firmneſs to his former Reſolutions, to obſerve the Judge of the Combat looking on? Nay, not only keeping his Eye upon every Conflict, but ſtepping forward, as it were, to his Aſſiſtance; holding forth the promiſed Crown of Life and Glory, ready to be put on, as ſoon as the Toil of the bloody Field ſhould be over, and his Servant's Faithfulneſs unto the End had won the ineſtimable Prize? What fulneſs of Aſſurance muſt that Hope be raiſed to, which ſaw *the Man Chriſt Jeſus* glorified? Saw him, not only as the Judge and Rewarder, but as the Example, and the Pledge, of Sufferings rewarded; and, in his Glory, conſequently foreſaw its own? What Sting could that Death have left, which led to ſuch a Life? What Reſentment could that Malice provoke, which, the more fierce and implacable it was, the more it made the Party, purſued by it, to reſemble that great Pattern; and whom it planted together into the Likeneſs of his dying, was ſure to advance to a proportionable Likeneſs, of his riſing and reigning in Heaven! Well enough may the Men, who make Senſe their Principle, and the World their God, look on the Atchievements of martyr'd Saints, as the Effects of blind Enthuſiaſm and ungovern'd Zeal; Well enough They, who feel no Motions, taſte no Comforts, but ſuch as Nature furniſhes; and know no Spring but Paſſion, no Law but Reaſon, detract from the Praiſes due to their Gallantry and Greatneſs of Soul; impute their Meekneſs, their Conſtancy, their Charity, to Weakneſs, or Phlegm, and natural Stupidity; or elſe repreſent them as impracticable, and therefore hardly credible: But where it pleaſes God to ſhed forth his Grace, and pour forth his Conſolations, with a liberal Hand; there Men find themſelves able to do and ſuffer much more, and in quite another Manner, than they ſuppoſed it poſſible; and than it was indeed poſſible, to have come up to, without ſuch plentiful Acceſſions of Strength from above. And therefore, even the Conqueſts,

gained by the Martyr of this Day, deſerve our Praiſe and Wonder; Though very much upon the Account of thoſe Sufferings and Virtues, which have immortaliz'd his Honour; yet moſt of all upon the Account of that extraordinary Grace, which even filled him with the Holy Ghoſt, and that *Glory revealed*, with which, he rightly reckoned, that *the Sufferings of this preſent time are not worthy to be compared.* Oh happy Sufferings, which qualified the Endurer to have part of his Heaven upon Earth! Oh Death truly triumphant, which put him into actual Poſſeſſion of Joys, whoſe Proſpect alone made ſo entire a Conqueſt over Infirmities and Temptations, Agonies and Terrors! But above all, Oh Goodneſs and Mercy, tender beyond Expreſſion! which ſo kindly conſidered the Greatneſs of thoſe Infirmities, common to all Mankind; the Force of thoſe Temptations and Terrors common to dying Men; and more eſpecially ſtrong upon Them, who die by Violence and Wrong; as to ſend Supports, as extraordinary as the Occaſion. Supports, contrived to animate, not Him only, to whom they were then vouchſafed, but full of Hope and Conſolation to Others, to all the Faithful. For, though the Favour we are treating of were particular, yet the Influences of it are large and general. And while we recollect St. *Stephen*'s Privileges, we do but half our Buſineſs, if they be not ſo conſidered, as to help us in a right Underſtanding of our Own. To which Purpoſe it is, that I promiſed to obſerve in the

Rom. viii. 18.

II. *Second* Place, What Concluſions are allowable to be drawn from this Inſtance before us, for the Comfort and Encouragement of every good Chriſtian, under any Sufferings and Dangers, which the Providence of God ſhall at any time think fit to engage him in; more particularly upon the approach of Death.

An Enquiry this, of ſo much greater Importance, becauſe of all the Advantages in this World, which recommend the Chriſtian Religion, none are more valuable,

luable, than thoſe Comforts we are encouraged to hope for from it, in ſuch diſtreſſed Circumſtances, as need it moſt. When human and temporal Succours have forſaken us, and leave no other Dependance, for the Soul to reſt itſelf upon; but the Senſe of a gracious God, and a good Conſcience at preſent, and the Proſpect of a glorious Reward for our Sufferings hereafter.

Now, of theſe Aſſiſtances and Supports in general, there are many Texts of Scripture, which ſufficiently aſſure us. Such as thoſe, wherein God declares, that *his Grace is ſufficient* for his afflicted Servants; that *his Strength is made perfect in their Weakneſs*; that *he will not ſuffer ſuch to be tempted above* their Ability, *but will with the Temptation alſo make a Way to eſcape, that they may be able to bear it*; That *he will never leave them, nor forſake them. So that we may boldly ſay, The Lord is my Helper, and I will not fear what Man ſhall do unto me.* Such Paſſages, and ſundry others of like import are every good Man's Security, that no neceſſary Grace or Conſolation ſhall be wanting to him. And the many extraordinary Inſtances of theſe Supplies, ſo abundantly imparted to the Saints heretofore, are ſo many Pledges, and freſh Confirmations of the Truth of God, in Promiſes of this Nature. But in what Manner, what Meaſures, what Seaſons, theſe Conſolations ſhall be afforded to each of Us, thoſe Examples are no farther a Rule to judge by, than the Caſe of thoſe Saints, and Ours, are alike. And therefore when we argue from this Topick, if we would avoid Miſtakes, and not flatter ourſelves with groundleſs Expectations, or charge God fooliſhly, for not allowing us Privileges that belong not to us: It muſt be our great Care to diſtinguiſh aright with regard to Three Things.

2 Cor. xii. 9.

1 Cor. x. 13.

Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

1. The Exigencies of the Caſes compared.

2. The Qualifications of the Parties concern'd.

3. The Nature of the Bleſſings and Supports themſelves.

1. As to the Exigencies of the Caſes compared; St. *Stephen*'s hath a great many Particularities in it, which forbid us to make it a Rule, for the Sufferings and Death of good Chriſtians in common. He was a Martyr for the Goſpel. And it is very reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that God, in his Goodneſs, will not fail to give Demonſtrations of his Love, ſuitable to the Degree of Theirs for Him, who give the laſt Proof of their Sincerity and Zeal, by ſacrificing their Lives to His Service. We cannot think it ſtrange, that he ſhould make clear Evidence, how kindly he accepts ſo coſtly an Oblation; and not only enable ſuch Men to offer it cheerfully, but ſhew them, by a View more than uſually diſtinct, what They ſhall receive in exchange in another World, who have accounted nothing dear to them in This, ſo they may win and bring Honour to their Lord.

But, if the ſhining Virtues, and flaming Piety, of Martyrs in general, ſeem ſo juſtly to recommend them to particular and diſtinguiſhing Marks of the Divine Favour, in their Conflicts; there is a great deal more to be ſaid, why St. *Stephen* ſhould be yet more eminently diſtinguiſhed. He was ſet in the Forefront of the Battle, the firſt of that noble Army, who reſiſted unto Blood, in Defence of *Jeſus* and his Truth. And it was of mighty Conſequence, what Iſſue that Encounter met with. Of mighty Conſequence, not only to the Champion himſelf; but to the Cauſe in which he was engaged, and to many Millions of Souls, who were to engage in it after him. The Religion, which undertook ſo boldly to renounce the World, and *brought Life and Immortality to Light*, was then in its Infancy. And an Inſtance of thoſe Regions of Immortality opening themſelves, to One, who had ſo ſtedfaſtly fixed his Eyes upon them, and, in the Strength of that Viſion, triumph'd over Death and Malice in their ghaſtlieſt Form, proved the Force, as well as the Certainty, of thoſe Hopes, and that Faith, inſpired by the Goſpel. His Adverſaries, who had recourſe to the ſame Methods

thods of Subornation, and pretended Blaſphemy, and Violence, and Tumult, in taking off this diligent Servant, as they had lately exerciſed upon his Maſter; deſerved to meet with the Mortification, of finding their Envy defeated, and their Hypocritical Zeal publickly diſallow'd by the God they profeſs'd to ſerve by it. But eſpecially They that already did, and They that were about to embrace this Religion, which, in a Time of general Perſecution, could not but coſt them very dear; needed the Benefit of ſuch an Example, to animate and fix their good Beginnings. 'Twas fit to ſhew theſe Men, how ready Heaven was to receive them; what Manſions were prepared there; how true that Promiſe is, that where their Lord is, they ſhall be alſo; And, in the mean while, that He, who had vanquiſhed Death, by enduring it, was always able, always at Hand, to impower thoſe, who tread in his Steps, to vanquiſh it the ſame way. And thus we may ſee, that St. *Stephen*'s Caſe is far from being a meaſure for Chriſtians in general, or any Warrant to promiſe themſelves the ſame Supports he found. For, as a Martyr, it was reaſonable, He ſhould be ſuſtained with higher Degrees of Grace, than They who undergo common Dangers, or die a natural Death; Becauſe it is One thing to die *in* one's Duty, and Another to die voluntarily *for* it. And, as the Firſt Martyr, it was fit He ſhould be a Pattern, and an Encouragement, to the reſt who were to follow. A Pattern, by the Perfection of his Virtues, An Encouragement, by the Revelation of his glorious Reward.

But, though we cannot aſſure ourſelves of theſe Spiritual Comforts, in the like Manner and Proportion, where our Circumſtances are not alike; Yet, ſo far as the Compariſon holds, we are warranted, from ſuch Inſtances as This, to rely upon, and be very confident of, ſuitable Aſſiſtances and Supports. For God is always the ſame. His Goodneſs and Wiſdom never fail to conſider the Infirmities of Human Nature, and that *Fleſh* which is *weak*, even when the *Spirit is moſt willing*. He will ever be very tenderly concerned, for the

Advancement of his own Honour, and of the Religion he hath enjoined and eſpouſed. And therefore, of what kind ſoever our Trials be, or from what Cauſe ſoever they proceed, due regard will certainly be had of them. And This ought to content us; ſince we are in the Hands of One, who is a better Judge of our Neceſſities, than ourſelves can poſſibly be; One, always determined rather to give over-meaſure, than to with-hold any part of what we really lack; One, not confined to any particular Method, but furniſhed with infinite Variety of Means, for conveying the Riches of his Grace to us; One, that knows how to make a lively vigorous Faith, and holy Hope, ſupply the Place, and ſerve the Purpoſes of Viſion, and immediate Revelation; One, who can let Heaven into the Soul of Chriſtians thus diſpoſed, as well as ſet the Beauties of it before the Eyes of St. *Stephen*. But then they muſt be Perſons diſpoſed, as St. *Stephen* was; for That, I ſaid, was a *Second* Diſtinction, neceſſary for directing our Judgment, and juſtifying our Expectations, in Matters of this Nature.

2. The *Qualifications of the Parties concerned.* Tho' there be nothing in the very beſt of us that can deſerve, either that Grace of God, which enables us to do or ſuffer according to his Good-will, or that Light of his Countenance lifted up upon us, when we do ſo; Yet no Truth is more expreſs, than that theſe Gifts, free as they are, will not be dealt to all promiſcuouſly. They always require and pre-ſuppoſe a Temper of Mind, fit for, and ſo far worthy of them, as to be within the Conditions they are promiſed upon. In St. *Stephen* accordingly, we cannot but obſerve a bright Conſtellation of the nobleſt Virtues. A Conſtancy immoveable, A Zeal moſt ardent, A Reſignation unreſerved, A Faith, and Meekneſs, and Charity, invincible. And, can we wonder that the Bleſſed Jeſus made ſuch condeſcending Approaches to One, who drew ſo near, came up ſo high toward Him, not only in the Wrongfulneſs and Manner of his Death, but in the Exerciſe of all

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thoſe Graces which adorned it, which rendered it ſo exemplary, ſo fruitful in Proſelytes, ſo victorious over Enemies and Gainſayers? The Hiſtory of the Chriſtian Church furniſhes many Inſtances of Perſons, who, in the Times of Perſecution, laid down their Lives, and underwent Tortures inexpreſſible, with a Cheerfulneſs and Magnanimity, far ſurpaſſing the Powers of Human Nature. Perſons, the Tenderneſs of whoſe Sex, or the Circumſtances of whoſe Condition, were by no Means a Match for the Sufferings they have been called to. And who yet, by their aſtoniſhing Cheerfulneſs, and undaunted Courage, have gained over more to the belief of the Truth they died for, at their laſt Hour, than their moſt artful Reaſonings, and moſt moving Eloquence, had been able to convince, during the whole Courſe of their Lives. And ſundry Others have, in every Age, met and encountered, and conquered Death, (which even when moſt natural, is a ſore Conflict) with a Compoſure of Mind, that excites the Admiration, and almoſt the Envy of the Beholders. But, if the Caſes in either of theſe Kinds be now more rare, than might in Reaſon be expected; It is not, becauſe the Arm of our Almighty Helper is ſhortened, or that the Force of Religion and its Principles is abated in itſelf; but from the Degeneracy of thoſe, who check the Influence theſe might have upon them. It is indeed, becauſe They, who never felt the Power of Chriſtianity while they lived, in vain expect the Supports of it, when they come to die. When Men under Inſults and Injuries, ſeek to relieve themſelves by Contention and Revenge, they take the Matter out of God's Hand, and diſcharge that Protection, which his Honour engages him to extend, to thoſe who *flee from Wrath, and let go Diſpleaſure, and commit their Cauſe and Perſons entirely, to their Righteous Judge and moſt merciful Creator.* When Diſtreſſes and Dangers put us upon unlawful Means of eſcape, or tempt us to truſt to an Arm of Fleſh, in the uſe of ſuch Means, as are moſt lawful; we have no longer Right to look, that He whom we ſhut

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out (ſo far as in us lies) from any part of our Affairs, will appear and interpoſe ſo viſibly in our Favour, as he hath often done, and is always ready to do, for Them, who flee ſtraight to him for Succour, and make his Providence their only Rock and Refuge, and diſclaim all other Confidences, as impious or vain. When ourlaſt dreadful Enemy marches up, and makes his Attack in all the Pomp of Terror; *When our Fleſh and our Heart faileth*, Can we ſuppoſe that God will declare himſelf Their *Portion* in Another Life, who never eſteemed or deſired, in this Life, any Portion but the Pleaſures, or Greatneſs, or Riches of the World, which are now forſaking them? No certainly. Nothing but a Reſemblance of St. *Stephen*'s Virtues, can intitle us to St. *Stephen*'s Conſolations. A Mind unlike His is not worthy, is not capable of them. To triumph over the Malice of our Enemies, we muſt bring ourſelves to forgive the worſt they can do to us. And that, not only when the Paſſions are cool, or Time hath laid our Reſentments to ſleep; but at the very Inſtant of our being higheſt provoked, and ſmarting moſt ſenſibly under the wicked Effects of their Spite. To enjoy the reviving Proſpects of a glorious Eternity, it is neceſſary we ſhould, with Him, *look up ſtedfaſtly to Heaven*; that our Affections and Hopes, our whole Heart, our whole Treaſure ſhould be there. And to *Sleep* as he did, when this long Night ſhall cloſe our Eyes; we muſt, as He *did*, *commit our Spirits into* the Hands of *the Lord Jeſus*; be perfectly content to leave the World, at any time in any manner he ſees fitteſt for us; we muſt devote ourſelves entirely to his Service, and be ſolicitous for nothing, but that, *whether we live, we may live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we may die unto the Lord.* To this Frame of Mind if we in good earneſt aſpire, we ſhall ſoon find thoſe Excellencies in Religion attainable, which, while at a diſtance from, we find ſome Difficulty to admit, as credible. And we ſhall then alſo taſte thoſe ſweet Satisfactions, which are *Pearls not to be caſt before Swine*, and too

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Holy to be given to the Dogs. But, till this be endeavoured with all our Might, for whatever we fall ſhort in the Aſſiſtances or the Comforts of Grace, the Loſs and the Blame is all due to our own Unfaithfulneſs and Sloth.

3. The *Third* and laſt Diſtinction to be made upon this Occaſion, concerns the Nature of theſe Bleſſings, and Supports themſelves. A Diſtinction, no leſs neceſſary than Either of the Former. Becauſe they are manifeſtly of Two Sorts; Some of them, Helps, toward the Diſcharge of their Duty; Others of them, Satisfactions, that ſweeten it to us. The End of the Former is to preſerve us in in Safety, That of the Latter, is to keep us at Eaſe. The One we cannot be without, becauſe they are Aſſiſtances; and therefore Theſe, which come within the Notion of neceſſary Grace, are within the Covenant; Such a God leaves no Man deſtitute of, if the Fault be not in the Perſon that wants them. The Other are properly Comforts, and come within the Notion of Rewards: And, ſince the Rewards of our Obedience are ſtrictly in the Happineſs of a Future State, Theſe are what we are rather to wiſh, and pray for, and rejoice in, than abſolutely to depend upon. God is very gracious and bountiful in affording them, becauſe they are Over-meaſure; but he is not unjuſt in with-holding them, becauſe they are uncovenanted Mercies. Theſe are indeed uſual, but by no means inſeparable, Attendants upon doing well. But Thoſe, not only follow, but go before us, in well doing; For, till we have Them, we can do no manner of thing that is good. When St. *Paul* prays, that God would fill the *Romans with Joy and Peace in believing*, he ſuppoſes their Faith to be ſincere, before the obtaining of that Joy and Peace. And many Paſſages aſſure us, that the Comforts of a good Life, and what we find called the *Light of God's Countenance*, are frequently with-held from excellent Perſons, and may be ſo, for their great Advantage. This may be done, as a farther Trial of their Patience and Perſeverance, their unchangeable Love of God, and the Firmneſs of their Rom. xiv. 13.

their Truſt in a Recompence hereafter, the larger in reſerve, by how much leſs they have down in hand here. And therefore, in all our Dangers and Diſtreſſes, we ought to think ourſelves well dealt with, if we have enough from above, to encounter, tho' not to ſoften, our Difficulties; to preſerve and ſecure our Virtue, tho' not to fulfil our Joy. And, even in our laſt Agonies, tho' Goddo not let in Heaven upon us, and raiſe our Souls up to St. *Stephen*'s Pitch; it is very well, if he ſuſtain our Hearts, reſcue us from the Enemy, who then eſpecially beſets us; and grant that wiſe and modeſt Prayer of our Church, in not *ſuffering us at our laſt Hour, for any Pains of Death to fall from him.* In ſhort, Helps are for a State of Combat; but Joys are for a State of Victory and Triumph. And therefore, till the Field be won, it ought to content us, that we are encouraged to *come boldly to the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain Mercy, and find Grace to help in time of need:* and exhorted, *not to be weary in well-doing*, with this Promiſe, that tho' we do not yet, yet *in due Seaſon we ſhall reap, provided we faint not.*

Burial Service.

Heb. iv. 16.

Gal. vi. 9.

I have choſen the rather to be large upon this Point, not only becauſe the Caſe of St. *Stephen* ſeemed to miniſter a proper Occaſion for it; but in Hopes of correcting an Error, very common in the World of laying too great a Streſs upon the Temper of Mind, in which Men appear to depart this Life. It is indeed a comfortable and very deſirable thing, when a good Man obeys this laſt Call, with all the Signs of Contentedneſs and Tranquillity of Spirit. But this is not a Circumſtance of ſuch Weight, as upon It alone, to form any reaſonable Judgment of our Brethren's State, in the World to which they are gone. Such a Death, it is true, is very agreeable to the Condition of ſincere Penitents, and devout Chriſtians. It is what the Reflection upon a Life well ſpent, and the Senſe of a God reconciled through the Merits and Sufferings of a crucified Redeemer, are above all things capable of producing.

cing. On the other hand, Nothing arms Death with ſo ſharp and painful a Sting, as the bitter Remembrances of Sin unpardoned, the loud Reproaches of a guilty Conſcience, and the diſmal Apprehenſions of a provoked Judge. But then it is to be conſidered withal, how ſtrongly the Mind and Body work upon each other, and what a ſpeedy Communication of Infirmities paſſes between them. The different Degrees of natural Courage, the ſeveral Conſtitutions of our Bodies, the uncertain Motions of the Animal Spirits, and the Ebbings and Flowings of a Diſtemper. Theſe, and a Hundred more Cauſes there are, either Natural or Caſual, in which Religion hath no part at all. And theſe upon a Bed of Languiſhing, may create ſuch different Impreſſions, as ſhall ſometimes occaſion Agonies and Fears in exceeding good Men, and a ſeeming Quiet and Security in very bad Men. If then we would be ſafe ourſelves, and think rightly of others, let us govern our Opinion, and our Behaviour, by this Rule, which will never deceive us; *That* the way to die the Death of the Righteous, is to live the Life of the Righteous; and, if we deſire our Latter End ſhould be like His, it muſt be our Care, that our Beginning, and our whole Proceeding, be like His too. For, though the Conſequence be not great, what Miſtakes we are guilty of, in regard of Them who go before us, and who are not one whit more or leſs happy, for the Judgments we make of them; Yet they are of mighty Conſequence in regard of ourſelves, who are too apt to be content with That, which we fondly imagine to be ſufficient for Others. But, be aſſured, that when we come to die, the Exerciſe of one proper Chriſtian Grace will ſtand us in more ſtead, than a great many of thoſe imaginary Satisfactions, with which Ourſelves, or Others, may happen to be then tranſported. And therefore, if we hope in earneſt to attain St. *Stephen*'s Happineſs, we ſhould rather make his Virtues, than his Viſion, our Pattern, And provided we have but the Former, the Matter is not great, if God do not allow us the Latter. Let us therefore make the

right

right Improvement of having this eminent Saint in Remembrance, and endeavour, as well as pray, that our Minds may be brought to his holy Frame. So that, in all our Afflictions, but eſpecially in any which it ſhall pleaſe God to call us to, for *the Teſtimony of his Truth, we may ſtedfaſtly look up to Heaven, and by Faith behold the Glory which ſhall be revealed*; *And being filled with the Holy Ghoſt*, whoſe neceſſary Graces are never wanting, to any who diligently ſeek and uſe them, *may*, attain to that eminent Inſtance of Charity, to *love and bleſs our Perſecutors.* Thus ſhall we find the Help and Favour of Him, *who ſtandeth at the right hand of God, to ſuccour all them that ſuffer for him*; and who, if not appointed to ſuffer for, yet do their utmoſt to live and die in, his true Faith and Fear, the *Bleſſed Jeſus, our only Mediator and Advocate.*

See Acts vii. 60. xii. 1. v. 40. xiii. 50. xiv. 5, 6, 19. 2 Cor. xi. 24, 25.

The GOSPEL.

PARAPHRASE.

St. Matth. xxiii. 34.

34. A Proof of all that Hypocriſy and obſtinate Wickedneſs, which I have laid to your Charge, you will ſhortly give, in the barbarous Treatment of all ſorts, which the Perſons, inſpired by God, Preachers and Expounders of the Chriſtian Law, ſhall receive at your mercileſs Hands.

34. *BEHOLD, I ſend unto you Prophets, and wiſe Men, and Scribes, and ſome of them ye ſhall kill, and crucify, and ſome of them ſhall ye ſcourge in your Synagogues, and perſecute from city to city.*

35, 36. Which incorrigible Malice and Obſtinacy will provoke God not only to puniſh this preſent Age of the *Jews*, for the Sins and Murders committed by their own Perſons; but alſo to bring upon them the Vengeance due for thoſe, committed by their Anceſtors. Whoſe Wicked-

35. *That upon you may come all the righteous blood ſhed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, unto the blood of Zecharias, ſon of Barachias, whom ye ſlew between the Temple and the Altar.*

36. *Verily I ſay unto you, All theſe things ſhall come upon this generation.*

Wickedneſs they have been ſo far from being reformed by, that they have imitated, repeated, and far exceeded it all.

37. *Oh Jeruſalem, Jeruſalem, thou that killeſt the Prophets, and ſtoneſt them which are ſent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy Children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not!*
38. *Behold, your Houſe is left unto you deſolate.*

37, 38. Oh wretched People (of which *Jeruſalem* is the Metropolis and common Mother) who thus perſiſt in murdering thoſe who are ſent to teach and to reclaim you! How many Inſtances of the tendereſt Affection, how many Offers of Converſion and Grace, of Protection and Defence, from the Calamities now approaching, have I over and over laid before you? but ye have rejected them all. Therefore theſe happy Opportunities are about to be taken away from you, and your deſerved Deſtruction is irreverſibly decreed.

39. *For I ſay unto you, Ye ſhall not ſee me henceforth, till ye ſhall ſay, Bleſſed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord.*

39. For, take my Word, the time of my preſent Manifeſtation among you will laſt but a little longer; and after that, thoſe Words of *David*, which, when applied to me, by the Acclamations of the Multitudes, provoked your Indignation, ſhall then in vain be in your Mouths, expecting your Meſſiah as a Deliverer, whom you ſhall find a juſt Avenger of your Crimes againſt him. Or, (as ſome Interpreters) this heavy Diſpleaſure of God ſhall continue upon You, and Your Poſterity, till You ſhall be converted, and acknowledge me for the true Meſſias (propheſied of by *David*) at my Second Coming.

COMMENT.

WE have here a remarkable Prediction of Two Things. (1.) The unparallel'd Cruelty of the Hypocritical and Unbelieving *Jews*, upon the Preachers of the Chriſtian Faith. (2) The Severity of thoſe Judgments, which were, by that Provocation, drawn down upon this inflexible People, and their City polluted with ſo much innocent Blood. The Former of theſe Predictions began to be fulfilled in the Martyr of this Day. The latter was charged upon him, as Blaſphemy againſt God, the Law, the Temple, and the Holy City, and made a Pretence for gratifying their Malice by his Death. Acts vi. 11, 13, 14.

In

In treating of this Scripture, I will firſt very briefly explain one or two Difficulties, for the better underſtanding of it; and then raiſe ſome practical Obſervations, which may help us to improve by it.

1. The Firſt Difficulty I ſhall take notice of, is that, which learned Men have thought ſo differently about, The Perſon meant in the 35th Verſe, by the Name of *Zacharias the Son of Barachias.* Concerning whom They ſeem to judge very probably, who think him that *Zechariah*, mentioned to be ſlain by the Command of King *Joaſh.* The Occaſion of his Death was the Freedom he took, in reproving a wicked People; The Place agrees with that mentioned here; The Sin of it is expreſly ſaid to be viſited upon the King and the People; Vengeance was imprecated by his laſt dying Breath; and the Name of *Barachiah*, being of the ſame Senſe with that of *Jehoiada*, it is thought, might in common uſe be put for it, in Reverence to that Name of *Jehovah*, which the later *Jews*, eſteeming it unlawful to utter, where the Letters of that Name occurred, are ſaid to have ſubſtituted another, of like Signification, in its ſtead.

See 2 Chron. xxiv. 20. *to* 26.

There are indeed Three Circumſtances, which incline to *Zechariah*, One of the Laſt Prophets. *One*, that he is expreſly the Son of *Barachiah* in Holy Writ; A *Second*, That he is, in one of the *Jewiſh Targums*, ſaid to be murdered in the Holy Place; a *Third*, That being later in Time, and but juſt before the Gift of Prophecy ceaſed, his Blood is thought more properly to be ſet, as the oppoſite Term to that of *Abel*; the One as the Firſt that ever was, the Other as the Laſt Prophet under the Law; Both put to Death by wicked Men, merely becauſe they were Themſelves, and laboured to make Others, Righteous.

Zech. i. 1.

Either of theſe Opinions hath its probable Arguments; Each far Superior to That, which applies this Paſſage to *Zachary*, the Father of *John* Baptiſt. Who does not appear, either to have been ſent to the *Jews* under the Character of a Prophet; or to have been owned by them

as

as ſuch; or to be the Son of *Barachias*; or ſlain as is here mentioned (except by a Tradition of no Credit at all.) So likewiſe, for that other *Zecharias* mentioned by *Joſephus*, it hath been thought not ſo ſufficiently made out, either that his Father's Name was the ſame, though near it; or that he was a Prophet; or that our Lord's Words can, without ſome Violence, be referred to an Action, done after the Time of ſpeaking them.

Mean while, though ſomewhat might be expected on ſo celebrated a Queſtion, I content myſelf with ſaying the leſs, becauſe the Knowledge of this particular Perſon ſignifies little to us; the general Senſe in the Paraphraſe ſufficiently declaring our Lord's Intention, and ſerving all the uſes, This Text is capable of.

2. Another thing I conceive to be neceſſary upon this Occaſion, which is, To ſet before you the juſt Extent of that kind Offer made by our Lord, to *gather* theſe Jews *as a Hen gathereth her Chickens under her Wings:* An Expreſſion that hath been thought conveniently enough interpreted in either of the Two following Senſes.

1. This manner of Speech plainly ſignifies Protection from Dangers. Thus *David* deſcribes the good Man's Safety, by ſaying, he ſhall *be covered under God's Wings, and reſt ſecure under his Feathers.* A manifeſt Alluſion to Fowls, ſheltering their Young upon the Approach of Birds of Prey. And then by this People's *Houſe being left unto them deſolate*, we are to underſtand the withdrawing that Protection, Which when deprived of, they would ſtand naked and alone; as liable to Deſtruction, as little Chickens are to be devoured by every ravenous Creature, when the Dam is not at hand to ſuccour, and ſpread herſelf over them. Pſal. xci. 4.

2. But Some place a peculiar Elegance in this Expreſſion, with regard to the ancient Sanctuary, in which the Cherubs ſhadowed the Mercy-Seat with their Wings. And, becauſe this was an Emblem of God's eſpecial Preſence; (a Preſence no where elſe ſo viſibly exhibited) therefore the Admiſſion of Proſelytes into Covenant

with the true God was called by the *Jews*, a Receiving or *Gathering*, of ſuch under the *Wings* of the Divine Majeſty. And thus our Lord's Willingneſs to *gather Jeruſalem's Children* under his Wings will mean all the kind Endeavours, to convince and inſtruct them in the Goſpel-Covenant, and to make them Partakers of thoſe Privileges, and that Salvation, which they, with ſo blind and unperſuadable an Obſtinacy, held out againſt.

I ſee not, I confeſs, any neceſſity, for ſtrictly confining the Words to either of theſe Senſes, in bar to the Other. For, ſince it is uſual in every Language, by one eminent Inſtance to intend All the Effects of any Paſſion; this Expreſſion may very well be extended to every Mark of Tenderneſs and Natural Affection, ſo viſible in the Creatures alluded to toward their Young. And, in proportion, to all the Teſtimonies of our Lord's Paternal Kindneſs and Care, whether relating to their Spiritual, or their Temporal, Preſervation. If ſo, the Puniſhment threatened to the Refuſers of ſuch Kindneſs, will include, not only a withdrawing his Defence from their City and Nation, but a depriving them of thoſe Means of Grace, which had been ſo long, and ſo liberally, but withal, by reaſon of their own Perverſeneſs, ſo unſucceſsfully, afforded, repeated, continued to them, before thoſe dreadful Judgments were ſuffered to take Place. The *Romans* could not demoliſh their Houſe, till that inviſible, but mighty Force within the Walls was drawn off. The Devil could not abſolutely captivate their Minds, ſo long as the Word and Spirit of Truth ſtrove againſt him. But, when they refuſed to join in their own Defence, the Grace of God would depart, and give them over to that Blindneſs, in which they remain to this Day. And when their Hypocriſy and Barbarity had made God their Enemy too, the Power of Man would then find it as eaſy, to ſeize and ravage, burn and deſtroy; as it is, to lay a Dwelling in Ruins, which is left perfectly empty, and forſaken to thoſe Owners or Inhabitants, whoſe Concern it was formerly to ſupport and defend it.

Thus

Thus much may ſuffice for the Explanation of this Paſſage. I now proceed to make Improvement of it, by ſome Practical Obſervations, proper to be raiſed from hence.

I. As *Firſt*, From the Caſe of the *Jews*, we may eaſily diſcern how very heinous, and provoking in the Sight of God, the Sin of Perſecution is. To ſtand it out againſt all the Power of Perſuaſion, and not entertain the Truth, when propoſed with the Evidence, brought by our Lord and his Apoſtles to confirm it; was a Perverſeneſs, like that of a Brood, refuſing to be gathered under the Wings of the Hen. But to do deſpight to, and count ſuch Perſons *our Enemies*, becauſe they tell us the Truth; to torment and murder thoſe, whoſe only Aim is to reform, and ſhew us our Errors, and ſo prevent our eternal Undoing; This is juſt ſuch unnatural Cruelty, as it would be, if the Brood ſhould fly upon their Dam, and tear her in pieces, when ſhe kindly offers them Protection, and ſpreads thoſe Wings abroad to receive them, under which alone they can be ſafe. This is ſuch a Prodigy of Ingratitude, as no Creature but Mankind, as none but the worſt and moſt unreaſonable among Men, were ever guilty of. And accordingly we find, that, after the ſeveral black Enormities and groſs Impoſtures, by which the Honour of God and Religion is ſaid, in this Chapter, to ſuffer ſo greatly; the indelible Reproach of *Jeruſalem*, the laſt unpardonable Aggravation of her Sins is charged, upon her being a *Killer of the Prophets*, and a *Stoner of them that were ſent to reclaim her*.

'Tis thus that they are ſaid to *fill up the Meaſure of their Fathers*. 'Tis hence, that our Saviour calls them *Serpents* and *Vipers*, and aſks, how they can *eſcape the Damnation of Hell*. And the Reaſon of their Proceeding in this Manner was their Hypocriſy; Uſing Religion as a Matter of Convenience, and putting on the Form of

Ver. 32.

Ver. 33.

it for a Diſguiſe, to cover their Ambition, or their Covetouſneſs, their Pride, or their Senſuality, which made them loth to have their Eyes opened, to the Prejudice of their Intereſts or their Luſts. And, if their Teachers would be troubleſome, be it at their Peril; for, when other Means failed, they knew one effectual Way, to quiet and put them to Silence, by making the Loſs of their Lives pay for the Forwardneſs of ſo bold a Zeal.

But we will put the moſt favourable State of the Caſe: Admit then, that Perſecution is not always from a ſenſual or worldly Deſign, but ſometimes from a good Meaning; which really ſuppoſes the Preachers of Truth to be ill Men and Deceivers, and the Honour of God, and their own Duty, to be highly concerned for ſuppreſſing and rooting them out. For thus our Lord forewarns his Diſciples, that *whoſoever killed them would think he did God Service*; And St. *Paul* teſtifies, not only of himſelf, that he *verily thought he ought to do many things againſt the Name of Jeſus of Nazareth*; but likewiſe of many of the *Jews*, *that they had a Zeal for God, though not according to Knowledge.* Yet ſtill Perſecution is a great and crying Sin, even in thoſe, who think themſelves bound to perſecute. The not knowing better did not excuſe theſe *Jews*, from that heavy Load of Calamities, denounced againſt them here. And St. *Paul* ſtiles what he did in that Perſuaſion, the Effect of *exceeding Madneſs*, and himſelf a *Blaſphemer, Injurious Perſon, and Chief of Sinners, becauſe he perſecuted the Church of God*, though at the ſame time he declares, *he did it ignorantly and in Unbelief.*

John xvi. 2.
Acts xxvi. 9.
Rom. x. 2.

Acts xxvi. 2.
1 Tim. i. 13, 15.

Now the Reaſon of this is plain and unconteſtable. For a Man's Opinion of Things does not alter the Nature of the Things themſelves. Moral Good and Evil are fixed in their own Condition and Eſſence, and in the Determination of the Divine Will. If my Conſcience then put me upon that which is Evil, it is not my miſtaking

miſtaking it for Good, that can make it ceaſe to be Evil, Either in Itſelf, or to Me. Every Man's Conſcience, 'tis true, is the Candle of the Lord within him: But it lies upon every Man, to take good Heed, at what Fire that Candle is lighted: That the Directions iſſuing from it be pure, and taken from the Word of God; and not from the Prejudices of his own Mind, and the Heat of a Sanguine or Enthuſiaſtick Imagination. For, the want of this Care is the very Reaſon, that ſo many People are miſled, and run even into the horribleſt Extravagancies, upon pretence of Conſcience and Religion. They bring their Intereſts, or their Pleaſures, or ſome other Prepoſſeſſions along with them, and then they accommodate Matters ſo, as to make the Laws of God ſtoop and bend to their own Humours. Thoſe are to them, like firſt Self-evident Principles; and all Things elſe appear true or falſe, in proportion as they agree, or diſagree, with Thoſe. This therefore is the Condemnation, that They, who mean right, do not take due Care to underſtand and Judge right. A thing impoſſible to be done when things are not conſidered fairly, all Heats or Animoſities, Inclinations, or Intereſts, Reſentments and Reſpect of Perſons, apart.

Now the letting ourſelves be miſguided, in ſuch a Caſe as Perſecution, cannot eſcape great Blame. Becauſe, however Men may happen to think differently in Matters of leſs Moment, or about dark and doubtful Controverſies; yet it is ſo exceeding evident, that Treachery and Malice, Tortures and Bloodſhed, are Methods ſo vile and black, ſo very diſhonourable, ſo very unfit for winning over Men of a contrary Judgment, whoſe contrary Judgment is all their Offence; (for otherwiſe it is not properly Perſecution) that one muſt have quenched a great deal even of his Natural Light, and have read the Scriptures with a very ſtrange Byaſs upon his Mind, who can turn his Thoughts to the Practice and Juſtification of ſuch Proceedings, upon any the moſt plauſible Pretence whatſoever. In ſhort, Zeal

is like all other Paſſions; when rightly placed, and duly moderated, of admirable Uſe and Benefit; But if blind, ſo as to miſtake its Object; or exceſſive, ſo as to degenerate into Fury; 'tis like a mad Man in the dark, that lays about him without Fear or Wit.

That then, which muſt bear a Man out in acting according to his Conſcience, is the right Judgment, which his Conſcience makes. Every boaſted Light is not raſhly to be followed, for (God knows) there are, in Religion too, many *Ignes fatui*, that lead Men into Bogs, and Precipices, and Ruin. But a true Light that cannot be, which carries Men quite away from the firſt and brighteſt Principles of Charity, and Juſtice, and even common Humanity. Such is the Sin of Perſecution, even when owing to that moſt favourable of all Cauſes, an ignorant Zeal: Becauſe then too the Viciouſneſs of the Means ſpoils all the Honeſty of the Intention. And though it be good to be *zealouſly affected always in a good thing*; yet if the thing be bad, ſo much the more zealous as the Affection is, ſo much the worſe it is; Both for the Miſchief it does in the World, and for the Guilt of the Perſon moved to act by it.

II. *Secondly*, The Example of thoſe *Jews* is a good Warning to us, not only how ſinful, but alſo how unpolitick a Method Perſecution is, and how improper to compaſs the Ends, generally intended to be ſerved by it. The Two great Arguments urged by that wicked Conſult of the *Jews*, for putting Jeſus to Death, were, leſt *if they ſhould let him alone, the whole World ſhould go after him, and the Romans ſhould come and take their Place and Nation.* And yet that very putting him to Death was the direct Occaſion of both theſe Events. Nor were They ſingular in ſuch Diſappointments. For many Inſtances have taught the World, that violent and ſanguinary Courſes are by no means fitted, either for ſuppreſſing Doctrines attacked by them, or for eſtabliſhing, and ſecuring, the Perſons and Opinions, that have recourſe to them. There is a

John. xi. 48.

certain

certain Tenderneſs in Human Nature, diſpoſing us to Compaſſion, and a kind Concern, for Them, whom we ſee treated injuriouſly. And the Sufferings of ſuch People, when ſupported with Meekneſs and Conſtancy, move us more effectually, than moſt other Arguments, to enquire into the Merits of a Cauſe, thought worth maintaining, at the Expence of Mens Lives. This made the Seed of the Martyrs Blood produce ſo plentiful a Harveſt of Believers. And, ordinarily ſpeaking, Men cannot do the Truth a greater Service, than to ſhew themſelves unreaſonably bitter againſt it. For, where This is the Mark of Envy and Oppoſition, God thinks himſelf concerned to interpoſe, for the Vindication of thoſe, who are ſent upon his Errand; and in the Exemplary Puniſhment of Wretches, ſo hardened, that they will not conſider, and ſo unrelenting, that they will not endure, either his Meſſage, or his Meſſengers. Thus we ſee, that of all the Corruptions, which cried aloud for Vengeance, both upon *Jeruſalem* in this Goſpel, and upon the Spiritual *Babylon* in the Revelation of St. *John*; None were ſo piercing in the Ears of God, none of ſo fatal Conſequence to the Authors, as that Blood of the Saints, which would not be pacified, till dreadful and ſpeedy Revenge was executed, on the Places polluted with it. So ill choſen is Perſecution, ſo unlikely to ſucceed, whether we regard the natural Conſequences of the Thing, or the Juſtice and Providence of Almighty God.

III. The Paſſage before us may be of great Uſe, for vindicating the Juſtice of God, in viſiting the Sins of the Fathers upon the Children. The Difficulties, uſually thought to lie upon ſuch Diſpenſations are, I conceive, ſufficiently anſwered, by the following Conſiderations.

1. That the Puniſhment, inflicted on ſuch Occaſions, is always ſome Temporal Calamity. For God never threatens, nor can it be proved that he ever inflicts, eternal Puniſhments, upon any Perſon whatſoever, for Sins, which were not of his own committing.

2. That even theſe Temporal Puniſhments are, in their own Nature, capable of turning to the Sufferer's Advantage. For thus they manifeſtly do, when, by the ſmart and load of the moſt ſenſible Afflictions, Men are more powerfully awakened to bethink themſelves, and change their Courſes. They may take warning, by the feeling of God's Wrath in this Life, to prevent the inſupportable and infinite Terrors of it in the next. And, if this be not the Conſequence of all our preſent Calamities, the Failure is, not from any want of Tendency or Capacity in the Things themſelves, but from our own want of improving them, to Purpoſes, which they are abundantly qualified for ſerving, when rightly applied.

3. That ſince every Man hath rendered himſelf liable to Eternal Puniſhments by Sin, it cannot reflect upon the Juſtice of God, to lay upon him the heavieſt of temporal Puniſhments. This is not an extremity of Rigour, but rather a Mitigation, and a Mercy. Eſpecially conſidering what was laſt alledged, that every temporal Judgment is capable of turning to Good, and of having the Effect of a Remedy, as well as a Penalty.

4. That, for theſe Reaſons, it can be no Reflection upon the Righteouſneſs of God, that he permits thoſe Sufferings to lie upon Children, which, in the natural Courſe of Things, deſcend to them, by Means of their Fathers Sins. As Poverty upon the Family of a riotous and profuſe, Diſeaſes and bodily Infirmities upon the Poſterity of a luxurious and lewd, Anceſtor, and the like. This is but ſuffering Cauſes to produce their Effects; And thoſe too ſuch Effects, as They, who ſmart under, have deſerved to feel, and yet may profit by the feeling of them.

5. But, *Fifthly*, It very often happens, that Children go on, and repeat, and add to the Sins of their Fathers, by offending in the ſame Kind and Degree. This is very likely to come to paſs, from a Reſemblance in Temper and Conſtitution, from the Imitation of ill Examples (which are not only always at home, and familiar to them, but corrupt with ſome Sort of

Authority, as being their Parents Actions) and from the Miſchief of a negligent or vicious Education. And, in ſuch Caſes, the Sins of Children are the more provoking, becauſe They do not take Warning by their Parents Wickedneſs, nor the Threatenings of God againſt it; but grow bolder by it, and draw down that Wrath upon themſelves, which the Long-Suffering of God forbore to execute upon former Generations.

6. *Laſtly*, Such Sins ſometimes grow Publick and National, and require Puniſhments, that are Publick and National too. In which caſe, the Community is always the ſame, though the Members, whereof it is compoſed, be not the ſame. And then there is a Neceſſity of ſuch Puniſhments being inflicted in this World, becauſe there will be no ſuch Thing, as Societies, or Bodies Politick, in the other World. So that, upon ſuch Occaſions, the Sufferer and Sinners are the ſame, becauſe the People or Kingdom, ſinning and ſuffering in a publick Capacity, are to be conſidered as One and the ſame.

And ſuch, as it is generally the Condition of Children, viſited for the Iniquities of their Forefathers; ſo was it in particular the Condition of theſe *Jews* before us. The Judgments here denounced were Temporal only, Such as had, in their own Nature, a Capacity of awakening and reclaiming, them; Such as they had provoked God to ſend upon them, by not only imitating, but far exceeding, and *filling up the meaſure of their Fathers* Iniquities; by withſtanding a clearer Light, crucifying the Son of God, and murdering thoſe that bore Teſtimony to his Reſurrection: Such, *Laſtly*, as were National and proper to revenge the Crimes, that had been ſuch. So that, upon the whole Matter, every Man's own Sins are the true and proper Cauſe of his own Puniſhments. And This vindicates the Juſtice of Providence. But the Sins of Anceſtors may be the Occaſion of God's chuſing to puniſh their Deſcendants, in this or that way; and may determine him as to the Kind, the Degree, the

Ver. 32.

the Time, and particular Circumſtances, of the Puniſhments he inflicts. All which, relating only to the Manner of doing it, and not to the Equity of the Thing done, no way affects the Juſtice, but only argues the Wiſdom of Providence. Had the Parties been guilty of no Sin, that of their Parents ſhould not have expoſed them to Suffering. But in regard themſelves had deſerved to ſuffer in this, or in any other, Manner, that their offended Lord ſaw fit; the Parents Sins, and Their Repetition of them, may reaſonably be allowed to quicken the Seaſon, and to fix the Method, of Puniſhing. So that this Time, and this Manner, ſhould be thought more fit, than any Other.

IV. *Fourthly*, This Paſſage gives Men a fair Intimation, how far they may expect Aſſiſtances from God, and how much depends upon themſelves, in order to their Conviction and Obedience of the Truth. He ſent his Prophets to *Jeruſalem*, but ſhe might chuſe, whether ſhe would believe and reverence, or whether reject and ſtone them. He offered *to gather her Children under her Wings*; but he left it in their Power, to accept or to refuſe thoſe kind Invitations. And, as the frequent repeating of ſuch Proffers was Evidence ſufficient of the Maker's Sincerity, ſo the perſevering in ſuch Refuſals was Proof undeniable of the Rejecters Perverſeneſs. Now the *Jewiſh* Nation are often termed God's *peculiar*, *his beloved People*, *his Vineyard*, *his pleaſant Plant*; And ſince God declares he had done all, that could be done, to make them fruitful; it muſt needs be of great uſe, to have a right Notion of his Dealings with thoſe Men, into whoſe Place and Privilege the Chriſtian Church ſucceeded. For, by finding out the true Cauſes of their Barrenneſs, we ſhall be enabled to juſtify the preſent Methods of Providence, and in good meaſure to prevent our own.

Exod. xix, Iſa. v.

Now, they that ſhall conſider this Matter impartially, may ſee very plainly, (I think) that, in the

Buſineſs

Buſineſs of Salvation, God proceeds with Men, by Methods of Perſuaſion, but not of Conſtraint. He allows the Means that are ſufficient, but he does not think himſelf bound to render that, which is ſufficient, neceſſary and irreſiſtible. He gives Men Opportunities of knowing their Duty; He warns them of the Danger of tranſgreſſing it; He does this, by the Miniſtry of his Word, by repeated Admonitions, by the Calls and good Motions of his Spirit; by the Checks of their own Conſciences; by inflicting ſuch Temporal Puniſhments, as are fitted to awaken them into better Conſideration; and by threatening Eternal, ſo ſure, ſo terrible, as ought in all Reaſon to affright them into better Manners.

But ſtill the Succeſs of all theſe Methods will turn upon our complying with, or holding out againſt, them. We may improve, or we may neglect, the Opportunities of Knowledge and Inſtruction: We may duly apprehend, or we may defy, the Danger of Diſobedience: We may hearken to, or we may ſtop our Ears againſt, the good Advice of our Teachers and Friends: We may follow, or we may ſtifle, the Motions to Godlineſs within, and ſilence the Reproaches of our own Minds: We may be reformed with *David*, or we may, with *Pharaoh*, be more deſperately hardened, by Afflictions; We may dread the Terrors of the Lord, or we may laugh at Hell, and think it but a painted Fire. In ſhort, all that is done, all that can be done in this Caſe, ſuppoſes an honeſt and diligent Application of our Minds, to render it effectual. The Honour of God is concern'd to ſee us want nothing, that may diſpoſe a ſober and teachable Temper, to believe and to act well and wiſely. For our Service could not be a reaſonable one, if the Arguments proper to draw us to it, were not ſuperior to thoſe, that perſuade the contrary. But God does not drag Men without Conſideration, nor will he compel them to conſider. For ſuch a Service could not be voluntary, nor conſiſtent, either with his Glory

to

to accept and reward, or with the Principles and Original Conſtitution of Human Nature, to pay. He forces none to ſin, for That would be a Blemiſh to his own eſſential Goodneſs; but he permits even the blackeſt Crimes, to ſhew that he will not deſtroy the eſſential Liberty of our Will. He leaves us to chuſe our Virtues, that ſo they may qualify us for a noble Recompence: And he ſuffers our Vices to be our own Act, for otherwiſe they could not be capable of Puniſhment.

To ſuppoſe, that *Jeruſalem's Houſe had been left unto her deſolate*, if her refuſing to be *gathered under* Chriſt's *Wings*, had been the poſitive and unavoidable Decree of God; and that, notwithſtanding ſo many Tenders of Mercy, ſhe could not poſſibly have been gathered; draws Conſequences after it, too horrid to be mentioned. It repreſents the Judge of all the Earth farther from doing Right, than the moſt inhuman and corrupt Judges in this World, ever were, or could be. 'Tis to involve our Saviour in a manifeſt Contradiction, and in effect to make him ſay, *How often would I have gathered thy Children, and yet I never would!* And what a Mockery is this now, what an Indignity, to all the tender Inclinations, he ſo affectionately expreſſes for their Good, to all his Tears and moving Lamentations over their Obſtinacy and Ruin, to all his ſolemn Calls and Warnings to Repentance? And therefore, if we will do our dear Lord Reaſon, and believe him in any Degree ſincere, in his moſt ſerious Proteſtations of this kind, we ſhall do well to obſerve from the Text,

V. *Fifthly*, That (generally ſpeaking) God's Deſertion of Men is occaſioned by their own Diſobedience. Becauſe our Lord *would ſo often have gathered Jeruſalem's Children, and they would not*; therefore *their Houſe was left unto them deſolate*, I have already ſaid, that theſe Words may be intended both of a Temporal, and Spiritual, Calamity. The Former is the Deſtruction of that City and Nation; the Latter

is removing from them the Light of the Goſpel. But Both repreſent to us ſuch a withdrawing of God's Favour, as is the Effect of their own Sins. Nothing is more plain in Scripture, than that all Sufferings of this preſent Life, how different ſoever in Kind or Degree, yet ſpring from the ſame bitter Root: And nothing more obvious to the Light of Reaſon, than that a Being, Infinite in Goodneſs, cannot take Delight in the Miſeries of his Creatures. Whatever therefore happens of this Nature, the true Account of it is, That God, conſidered in the Quality of a Governor, ſees ſuch Diſpenſations neceſſary, to preſerve the Honour of his Laws, and to contain his Subjects in their Duty, by making ſometimes terrible Examples of refractory and preſumptuous Offenders. Accordingly, through the whole Courſe of the *Jewiſh* Story, we find not only their Bleſſings, whether Publick or Private, conſtantly ſuſpended on the Condition of Obedience; but likewiſe, upon every remarkable Judgment that befel them, expreſs mention made, of the particular Provocations, which moved God to ſuch Inſtances of Severity. Here more eſpecially, where the laſt diſmal Deſolation was foretold, God is ſaid to have determined it, becauſe they had even exceeded all the Rebellion, and bloody Malice of their impious Fore-fathers. Indeed, becauſe every Method of treating them was found ſo perfectly in vain, that they grew not one whit the better, but a great deal the worſe, for all their Remedies. The Servants and Prophets of God had been ignominiouſly handled, The Son of God himſelf crucified, The Apoſtles and Diſciples of that Son, riſen from the Dead, ſtoned and ſlain with the Sword, before this dire Reſolution of Vengeance took Place. Exhortations and Warnings, Threatenings and moſt importunate Expoſtulations, had been all thrown away upon them. Many Signs of their approaching Ruin foretold, Many ſore Diſtreſſes entertained, without

out any Impreſſion or Effect. And then at laſt, when both the Time and the Pains, the *digging about and dunging the Fig-tree* turned all to no Account; then, I ſay, and not till then, the Patience of this Maſter of the Field was wearied out. Then after ſo many Expectations defeated, after ſo much Care and Coſt beſtowed to no Purpoſe, the Dreſſer of the Vineyard receives that fatal Order, *Cut it down, why cumbereth it the Ground?*

Luke xiii.

Thus it is, with regard to Mens Temporal Concerns. And are we not, think you, greatly Injurious to the Goodneſs of Almighty God, if we ſuppoſe his Kindneſs and long-ſuffering leſs indulgent to our Spiritual? The Reaſon, given by St. *Paul*, why *Jeſus* ſaid unto him, *Make haſte and get thee quickly out of Jeruſalem*, follows in the next Words, *For they will not receive the Teſtimony concerning me.* And the Account He and *Barnabas* render of their Conduct at *Antioch*, is this, *It was neceſſary the Word of God ſhould firſt have been preached unto You, but ſeeing yet put it from you, and judge yourſelves unworthy of everlaſting Life, lo we turn to the Gentiles.*

Acts xxii. 18.

Acts xiii. 46.

Now the Grace of God, to render the Preaching of the Word effectual, is repreſented in the New Teſtament, as a Mercy, no leſs neceſſary in order to Salvation, than is the imparting of that Word itſelf. And therefore we have Reaſon to conclude, that the ſame Methods of Providence are obſerved, with regard to the Inward, as to the Outward Expedients. We could not know our Duty without the Word: and we cannot comply with that Word, without the Aſſiſtances of Divine Grace. To damn Men therefore for Breach of Duties, which they could not know, were not a greater Barbarity, than to damn them for not performing thoſe Duties, which they never had Ability to perform. As then God juſtifies his Proceedings towards Sinners, by condemning them, only for the breach of ſuch things, as they did or might know; ſo is their Damnation likewiſe

likewiſe juſt, becauſe inflicted, only for not doing what they might have done. Conſequently, the Grace, as well as the Law, of God muſt be imparted; though not to every Man, in equal Meaſure, yet in ſuch Meaſure to every Man, as, all Circumſtances conſidered, might have been ſufficient to prevent that Man's Damnation. Conſequently again, As the depriving Men of the outward Miniſtry of the Word is a Puniſhment, for their Neglect or Abuſe of it; ſo the withdrawing the inward Aſſiſtances of Grace, which ſtand in an equal degree of Neceſſity to our Salvation, proceeds from Men behaving themſelves negligently, or contemptuouſly under them. And they do not periſh, becauſe they never had good Motions, or Power to be ſaved; but becauſe, (as the Scriptures expreſſes it) they reſiſt, and quench, and grieve the Holy Spirit; that is, by diſappointing and oppoſing ſuch Motions, they drive him away out of their Hearts; and ſo provoke God, in this Senſe too, *miſerably to deſtroy thoſe wicked Men*, and *to let out his Vineyard to others*, to better, more honeſt, more diligent, more thankful *Huſbandmen, who will render him its Fruits in their Seaſon.*

VI. From all this it follows, in the *Laſt* Place, That Sinners are the Authors, the true and proper Cauſe, of their own Deſtruction. They muſt needs be ſo, if all the Means uſed for their Advantage, do conſtantly require, and ſuppoſe their own Concurrence, to render them ſucceſsful; and, if the Grace neceſſary for their Improvement under ſuch Means, be not denied or withheld, till their own Neglect or Unfruitfulneſs have firſt provoked God, to leave them deſtitute of his Succour and Protection. So that, upon the whole Matter, God deals very fairly and bountifully with his Servants. And all thoſe melancholy Fears are vain and Groundleſs, which ſome miſtaken People perplex themſelves withal, as if the Helps, that ſhould enable them to do well, were never, or never would be, afforded to them.

We

We cannot indeed expect, that *that which is Holy ſhould be given to Dogs*, or the moſt precious of all *Pearls* continue always to be *caſt before Swine*, which *trample them under foot*, and turn the Gift to the Diſhonour of the Giver. But, till our Conſciences can truly charge us, with wilful Negligence, and groſs Contempt; the Promiſes of the Goſpel ſtand ſure, and we may depend upon it, that God *will never leave us nor forſake us.* He will not remove our Candleſtick, till we have refuſed to walk by its Light: Nor ſuffer Error and Impiety to intercept the Luſtre of this Truth, till that Truth hath been ſcornfully caſt behind our Backs. He will not forſake or give us up into Temptations, till we have forſaken Him, and ceaſe to ſtrive againſt them; that is, till ourſelves take part with the Tempter, to betray and deſtroy ourſelves.

Let it therefore be our Care, to diſcharge Our Part Manfully in this Spiritual Warfare; for we ſhall be ſure to *find Grace to help in time of need*, and our Strength will increaſe in proportion to our Difficulties, *if we faint* not. The ſame Bleſſed *Jeſus*, who appeared to the Martyr of this Day, to ſupport him in his Sufferings, is always ready at hand to ſuccour every ſincere and reſolute Chriſtian. And no Man yet ever fell from God, who did not fall from his own Stedfaſtneſs. Let us ſettle in our Minds a hearty Will to do well; and the whole, in Effect, is done. Let us ſubmit to be taught, and we ſhall know, what is the acceptable and perfect Will of God. Let us take heed to the fixed Meaſures of our Duty, and conſider the mighty Encouragements we have, to perform it faithfully; the Reaſonableneſs and the Neceſſity of a holy Life; and let us ſet about this important Buſineſs without delay; leſt the Diſhonour, which a ſcandalous Converſation would reflect upon ſo excellent a Doctrine, provoke God to *hide the things which belong to our peace*, for ever *from our Eyes.* And, if at any time he ſees fit to chaſtiſe us with Temporal Calamities, or Spiritual Deſertions; let us then eſpecially, with Humility and Sorrow, lay our Mouths in the

the Duſt, and acknowledge, that *He is righteous in all that is come upon us*, but *We and our doings are wicked.* If then we have any regard to our private or to our publick Happineſs, to our preſent or our future Safety, let us beware, above all things, of hardening our Hearts by Obſtinacy, and Contempt of God's Word and Commandment: Leſt they ſhould, by degrees, involve us in dark Ignorance, and blind Zeal, and a furious Hatred of Chriſt and his Miniſters. For, wretched, above all Creatures, are thoſe abandon'd Men, whom, becauſe they *would not obey the Truth*, God *gives over to ſtrong Deluſions, that they ſhould believe a Lie.* No Symptom is ſo ſad as This. No Caſe ſo deſperate as Theirs, who do things the moſt unpardonable, and moſt highly offenſive to God, at the ſame time, that they falſely imagine themſelves doing him the moſt acceptable Service. Such is the Condition of Them, who firſt reject, and then perſecute the Prophets. Such was Theirs, who ſtopped Their Ears, and ran upon St. *Stephen*, as one not fit to live. And the End of ſuch barbarous Outrage, and inflexible Perverſeneſs, will be that in my Text. All that our Saviour then hath left to do, is to bewail the unretrievable Miſery of thoſe, who will not ſuffer themſelves to be reſcued from Deſtruction. And every ſuch Perſon, or People, will have the juſteſt Occaſion to apply to their own moſt deplorable Circumſtances this moſt tragical Lamentation, *O how often would my Lord have gathered me, and I would not! Therefore my Houſe is left unto me deſolate.* Which wretched State God give us the Grace in due time to prevent, for His Sake, who ſhed his own Blood to prevent it, Jeſus Chriſt the Righteous. To whom with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, Three Perſons and One God, be all Honour and Glory for ever and ever. *Amen.*

St. John *the Evangeliſt's Day.*

The COLLECT.

John i. 4.
Epheſ. v. 14.
1 John i. 5, 6, 7.
John xii. 35.
viii. 12.
Coloſ. i. 12.

MErciful Lord we beſeech thee to caſt thy bright Beams of Light upon thy Church, that it being enlightened by the Doctrine of thy bleſſed Apoſtle and Evangeliſt St. *John*, may ſo walk in the light of thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlaſting life, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. *Amen.*

The EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE.

1 St. John i.

1. *THat which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have ſeen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life:*

2. *(For the Life was manifeſted, and we have ſeen it, and bear witneſs, and ſhew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifeſted unto us.)*

3. *That which we have ſeen or heard, declare we unto you, that ye alſo may have fellowſhip with us; and truly our fellowſhip is with the Father, and with his Son Jeſus Chriſt.*

1, 2, 3. The Deſign of this Epiſtle is to acquaint you with the Diſpenſation made uſe of by God, to bring Men unto Happineſs and Life Eternal. A Diſpenſation, in the Purpoſe and Decree of God from the Foundation of the World, and wrought by a Perſon, who was himſelf God, from all Eternity, foretold and revealed to the Prophets heretofore, but in this laſt Age manifeſted to us, in the plaineſt and fulleſt manner that could poſſibly be. The Author of it becoming incarnate, and converſing with, and inſtructing us in it. So that our Teſtimony in this Matter is above all exception, leaving no room for Doubt or Deceit, ſince, for the Truth of what we declare, we have the utmoſt Evidence, that Diſtinct Knowledge, and Demonſtration of Senſe, nay the concurring Report of all our Senſes, that are qualified to judge of ſuch things, can give us. And therefore what we thus aſſuredly know we impart unto You, that ye may be Partakers in the ſame Bleſſing; and united, as we are, to God and his Bleſſed Son both by the ſame Grace, through Jeſus Chriſt.

4. *And*

4. *And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.*

4. So that your Comfort, and the rendering your Joy in believing complete, is the End aimed at in sending this Epistle.

5. *This then is the message that we have heard of him and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*

5. But in order hereunto, it is absolutely necessary, you should rightly understand the true Terms, upon which this Union stands. For, whatever some vain Pretenders to the highest degrees of it may suggest, the Doctrine given us in Commission to preach, is, that God is a perfectly Holy Being, without the least Blemish, or mixture of Impurity.

6. *If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.*

6. 'Tis therefore to no purpose, to boast of being like, or united to Him, (as the Gnosticks do) so long as we indulge ourselves in a vicious course of Life. For all such big Pretensions are false and groundless, and a direct Contradiction to the Gospel.

7. *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the Blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

7. The only Proof to be made of this Privilege belonging to us, is such an Imitation of his Holiness, as we are capable of; by abstaining from all gross habitual and wilful Sins at least; and, if this be done, the Blood of Jesus Christ will deliver us from the Guilt and Power of all Sin.

8. *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

8. A Mercy, which we even then shall still have need of. For, to suppose in any Circumstances (much more in such as Theirs) that we are perfectly clear of Sin, is a wretched Delusion, and, in Effect, overturns the whole Scheme of the Gospel.

9. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

9. For this Gospel plainly supposes all Men Sinners; and directs the Confession of their being such, and a stedfast reliance upon the Truth and Goodness of God, as the proper way to obtain Forgiveness. Since he who cannot break his Word, hath engaged it, for the Salvation of all truly humble and penitent Sinners.

10. So, that for any Man who calls himſelf a Chriſtian,

10. *If we ſay that we have not ſinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

(but eſpecially ſuch filthy Creatures as the Gnoſticks,) to ſay they have been guilty of no Sin, is to give the lie, not only to themſelves, but to God too. 'Tis in Effect, to renounce the Goſpel, which declares ſuch Practices as theirs, to be exceeding ſinful, and proceeds upon a Suppoſition, that all Men have been Sinners, and conſequently ſtood in need of that Redemption preached by it.

COMMENT.

IT hath been generally thought, and with great Probability, that this Epiſtle, though of general uſe to all Chriſtians, was yet in a more eſpecial manner deſigned, to refute ſome very groſs and pernicious Errors, which crept very early into the Church. Of theſe *Simon Magus*, and his immediate Followers, were the Firſt Broachers. But, in proceſs of time, they were improved and refined upon, and made up, all together, that abominable Scheme of Falſhood, commonly known, by the Name of the Hereſy of the *Gnoſticks*. A Sect of Men ſo called, from the vain Pretenſions they made, to extraordinary degrees of Illumination, and Knowledge, not imparted to Chriſtians in common; Such, as they repreſented all others incapable of, who were not Partakers in the ſame deteſtable Principles and Practices with themſelves; And ſuch, as they made their own excelling in, a certain Mark, of their being the truly Spiritual Perſons, and of a more intimate Union with God and Chriſt, by Vertue of his Seed remaining in them, which rendered them his Children in a peculiar manner. To thoſe and ſundry other wicked and fantaſtical Notions, ſeveral Expreſſions in this Epiſtle ſeem plainly to allude: Which are the more particular and uncommon, becauſe ſpeaking in the Language and Idiom, familiar to the Perſons it was written againſt. And it was likewiſe intended to undeceive the honeſt and Orthodox; whoſe Simplicity might

Iren. l. 1. c. 16. 24.
Clem. Alex. Pædag. l. 1. c. 6. p. 107.

might be liable to Danger; from the pompous Words, and boasted Perfection, of those arrogant Seducers. And therefore I conceive it necessary, in order to a right Explanation of this First Chapter, briefly to observe the false Doctrines, which the several Parts of it were in likelihood prepared by the Apostle, as an Antidote, to repel the Force, and draw out the Venom of.

1. Now *First*, Several of those early Hereticks gave out, That Christ did not suffer nor die. Some of them affirmed, that the Senses of those who were present at the Crucifixion, were imposed upon, by a false Appearance of *Jesus* dying on the Cross. Others denied, that *Jesus* and *Christ* (or the *Word*) were the same; pretending, that *Christ*, or the *Word*, was a distinct Person or Power, which descended upon *Jesus* at his Baptism, continued with him till his Passion, but then withdrew and left him alone; So that *Jesus* only, but not *Christ*, or the *Word*, was crucified, and died. In opposition to these several Falshoods, (as pernicious as they are groundless) the Apostle begins his Epistle, with a solemn Declaration of the Truth of the Gospel-History concerning this Matter; and that undoubted Evidence, which the Writers and Reporters of it went upon. He asserts, that not one single Sense, but every Sense capable of judging in the Case, had received the utmost Satisfaction. Alluding probably, in more special manner, to that irrefragable Demonstration of his rising with the self-same Body, which they had seen nailed, and wounded, and expire upon the Cross, mentioned by St. *Luke*, as given to the *Eleven*, when commanded by our Lord to *handle him and see*, whether he had not real Flesh and Bones; and when thereupon *he shewed them his Hands and his Feet:* And, to that Satisfaction, allowed one doubting Apostle in particular, who was convinced by *thrusting his Hand* into the Wound made by the Spear in our Lord's *Side*, and *putting his Finger into the*

Iren. adv. Hæres. l. 1. c. 23. Cap. 25. ibid. *So* Cerinthus. Aug. de Hæres.

Luke xxiv. 39, 40.

John xx. 27.

Print of thoſe Nails, that had faſtened his *Hands to the Croſs*. So that, in this Aſſurance of our Saviour's riſing the ſame, was included the Aſſurance of his dying really, and in all reſpects, the ſame Perſon with whom they had converſed familiarly, during the whole time of his preaching and working Miracles here on Earth. And therefore *the Blood of Chriſt is affirmed* in this Chapter *to cleanſe us from all Sin*; and *Jeſus Chriſt* ſaid to be *the Propitiation for the Sins of the whole World.* (Chap. ii. 2.) And *He is called a Liar, who denies that Jeſus is the Chriſt*; Not only He, who ſets up any other againſt him, but He, who ſeparates, and makes theſe to be Two diſtinct Perſons. But whether this were the immediate View of the Apoſtle or not, his general Aim was certainly to ſhew, that They, who have left us the Account of our Bleſſed Lord's Life, and Death, and other Tranſactions, in Human Nature, did not deliver this raſhly or at random; but had ſuch Opportunities, ſuch perfect Knowledge, ſuch abundant Conviction, that no Man can ever hope to be ſure of any thing, if They were not ſure, that the Facts they related are true. And conſequently, all that Credit, which the Conſideration of a Relator's not being deceived himſelf can give to any Teſtimony, is due to Theirs upon this Occaſion; who, as St. *Luke* expreſſes it, had *many infallible Proofs, and a perfect underſtanding of all things* written by them.

Chap. ii. 22.

Acts i. 3.
Luke i. 3.

2. Another Error of thoſe Hereticks conſiſted in affirming our Lord to be a mere Man, and to have had no exiſtence, before his appearing in our Nature. And againſt this thoſe Expreſſions may reaſonably be thought levell'd, which call him *the Word of Life, the Life*, and that *Eternal Life, which was with the Father, and was manifeſted unto us*. Phraſes, which, taken by themſelves, ſeem irreconcileable to ſo mean Notions of him. But, when compared with the beginning of that Goſpel written by this Author, and conſidered with his manner

So Ebion *and* Cerinthus.

Ver. 1.
Ver. 2.

manner of ſpeaking, can ſcarce be fairly interpreted of any thing leſs than a Divine Being, which this Perſon, this true (Λόγος καὶ Ζωὴ) *Word* and *Life*, had *with the Father*, before the time of his Manifeſtation to the World.

3. Another Folly obſervable in thoſe Hereticks, was their vain boaſting of a more intimate Communion with God, than any beſides were admitted to. And this too notwithſtanding they indulged, and even juſtified themſelves in, the Practice of the moſt infamous and beaſtly Vices. All which the Apoſtle here confronts with that *Fellowſhip*, which He, and every true Believer, *have with the Father, and with his Son Jeſus Chriſt.* A *Fellowſhip* ſo glorious, that it miniſters *Fulneſs of Joy*, Such a Joy, that the nobleſt and moſt beneficial End, he could purpoſe from this Epiſtle, was the bringing them, to whom it was addreſſed, to a part in it. But withal, that this could be never effected, without Purity of Life, and an Imitation of thoſe Divine Excellencies, which all, who thought worthily of God, muſt acknowledge to be in Him; and to be a Pattern, neceſſary for All to Copy after, who would be dear to, and particularly in Union with, him.

Iren. adv. Hær. L. 1. Chap. 1.

Ver. 3.

Ver. 4.

Ver. 5.

Ver. 6.

Ver. 7.

4. A *Fourth*, and yet greater (if any can be greater) Extravagance than the Former, was, That the vileſt Abominations left no Stain, contracted no Guilt, in the Perſons of Their Sect, That to the Reſt indeed, whom in diſdain they termed Men of an *Animal* Life and Principle, the Obſervation of moral Virtues was neceſſary, and the contrary Vices would be charged to their Account; But for Themſelves, who were the only *Spiritual* Perſons, They neither did, nor could ſin. Their Condition and Privileges exempted them from ſo mean a Diſpenſation, as that of Morality; and They could no more be defiled with any Vice they lived in, than the Rays of Light are ſullied by

Iren. ubi ſupra.

ſhining into a Dunghil, or Gold loſes its Value, by mingling with the Filth of a Common-Shore. To this St. *John* oppoſes the Conditions, upon which the true Chriſtian Fellowſhip with God and Chriſt ſtands. That it is an Endeavour after Perfection, but not the Attainment of an abſolute or ſinleſs Perfection in this Life: That our Freedom from Sin conſiſts in being *cleanſed* from it, not in having no need to be cleanſed; in *confeſſing* and being forgiven what we do amiſs, not in never doing amiſs at all: And, that to aſſume to ourſelves the Character of perfect Innocence, is to contradict the expreſs Word of God, and overturn the whole Goſpel at once. For this propounds Chriſt, as the Foundation of our Faith, becauſe the Propitiation for our Sins; and promiſeth eternal Salvation, as a Mercy given to the Penitent, but by no means as a Recompence due to the Innocent.

Ver. 7.
Ver. 8.
Ver. 9.
Ver. 10.

Some may perhaps object againſt this Application of St. *John*'s Words, that the main Aſſertors of Two or Three Errors here mentioned, were after Him in Time, and conſequently we do ill, to ſuppoſe this Diſcourſe directed againſt Opinions, not yet in Being. But this will be of leſs weight, if we conſider, how oft the Fathers accuſe theſe Hereticks, of agreeing in their vicious and ſenſual Practices, however differing in ſome Niceties of Doctrine. The Seeds of all their Errors are frequently declared, to have been ſown by *Simon Magus*, and his immediate Diſciples; however Others, who cultivated and brought them to Maturity, might afterwards be diſtinguiſhed, by the Improvement, or more open avowing, of theſe Tenets, as though they had been the firſt Authors and Inventors of them.

Iren. L. 1. Cap. 20, 30, 33. L. 2. C. 56.
Cyril. Hieroſ. Catech. vi.
Aug. cont. Adverſ. Leg. & Proph. L. 2. C. 12.

Having thus briefly obſerved, what I conceive neceſſary, for a right underſtanding of St. *John*'s immediate Deſign; I come now to treat of the Scripture be-

fore us, in a greater Latitude, and ſuch as may be of uſe to ourſelves, and all Chriſtians in general. To which Purpoſe I ſhall employ the Remainder of the preſent Diſcourſe, upon the following Heads.

I. *Firſt*, To prove, that the Advantages of the Goſpel are not poſſible to be attained, without a pure and holy Life.

II. *Secondly*, To ſhew, That this Holineſs and Purity is not ſo abſolute, as to render us, in the preſent State, free from all manner of Sin. And then

III. *Thirdly*, To obſerve, by what Methods we may hope to attain thoſe Advantages; notwithſtanding the Remains of Sin, which do, and will, ſtill cleave to the very beſt of Chriſtians, while they continue here upon Earth.

I. *Firſt*, I ſhall prove the Advantages of the Goſpel not poſſible to be attained, without a pure and holy Converſation. One would think this ſo exceeding plain, that there need no Pains to be taken, for convincing any Man, who hath read or heard of the New Teſtament. For how peremptorily do we find it there declared, *That the Wrath of God is revealed from Heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of Men, who hold the truth in unrighteouſneſs*: That *the Grace of God, which bringeth Salvation, hath appeared to all Men, teaching us, that denying ungodlineſs and worldly Luſts, we ſhould live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godlily, in this preſent World; Looking for that bleſſed Hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, who gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himſelf a peculiar People zealous of good Works*: That our *faith muſt be ſhewn by our works*, and that, *though we have all knowledge, and all faith, and have not charity, we are nothing*. Nay we are worſe than

Rom. i. 18.

Tit. ii. 11, 12, 13, 14.

Jam. ii. 14, *to* 26.
1 Cor. xiii. 2.
Luke xii. 47, 48.

nothing,

2 Pet. i. 5, 6. 7, 8. nothing, becauſe *He that knows his Maſter's will, and doth it not, ſhall be beaten with more ſtripes.* That *the adding to our Faith Virtue, and Temperance, and Patience, and Godlineſs, and Brotherly Kindneſs, and Charity,* and taking Care that *theſe things,* not only *be, but abound in us,* is the only Method to prevent our being *barren and unfruitful in the Knowledge of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*; That Heb. xii. 14. *Holineſs* is that Qualification, *without which no Man ſhall ſee the Lord*; That *This is the Will* 1 Theſ. iv. 3, 4, 5. *of God, even our Sanctification, that every one of us ſhould know how to poſſeſs his Veſſel in Cleanneſs and Honour: Not in the Luſts of Concupiſcence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:* That, for the indulging of thoſe Luſts, the Coloſſ. iii. 6. *Wrath and Vengeance of God, cometh on the Children of Diſobedience:* And that They, who give ear to ſuch as would perſuade them, that it is poſſible, for *any* 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, Epheſ. v. 5, 6. *Whoremonger, or Unclean Perſon, or Abuſer of himſelf with Mankind, or Thief, or covetous Man, or Drunkard, or Reviler, or Extortioner, to inherit the Kingdom of Chriſt and of God,* are groſly ignorant in the Terms of their Salvation, and ſuffer themſelves to be *deceived with vain words.*

I ſhould never make an end, did I go about to ſet before you all the Paſſages of Scripture, that might be produced to the ſame purpoſe. But for this there is no occaſion. For, what farther Satisfaction can any reaſonable Man deſire in the Point, than ſuch expreſs Declarations as theſe already alledged, that an impure and wicked Life is a direct Contradiction to the main End of revealing the Goſpel; That it oppoſes and defeats the Deſign of our Bleſſed Saviour's coming into the World; That it renders the moſt exalted Degrees of Knowledge and Faith of no Account, and turns what was meant our Privilege into the heavieſt Article of our Condemnation; That it incapacitates Men for all that Bliſs and Reward, propoſed for their Encouragement, and expoſes Chriſtians to the ſame Indig-

Indignation and Puniſhment, with the vileſt and darkeſt Heathens. For it matters not much what a Man is in Profeſſion, if he ſtill continue a Heathen in Practice. Matters not? Yes, ſuch Profeſſors aggravate their Guilt, by living in Defiance of their own Principles, diſhonouring the Name of a Chriſtian, which they vainly take to themſelves; and, by their Deeds of Darkneſs, abuſing and reproaching that Light, which, while they fondly boaſt of, they yet refuſe to be directed, and to walk by.

One would wonder indeed, which way it ſhould come to paſs, that Men, who think at all, ſhould ever be prevailed upon, by a Deluſion ſo fatal, and in a Caſe ſo exceeding plain. Which, how to Account for I cannot well tell, otherwiſe than by ſaying, That the acquiring of Knowledge offers Violence to none of our ſenſual Inclinations, but is an agreeable Entertainment to the Mind; That the Improvements of this Kind are, what every body is not equally capable of. And therefore, as this is a Diſtinction, more viſible and more eaſy to us, than that of ſubduing our Luſts and Paſſions, and excelling in moral Virtues, the Exerciſe and Habits whereof People of meaner Parts and Attainments may come up to us in: So the affecting to diſtinguiſh ourſelves this way, flatters our Vanity, and falls in with that very Corruption of human Nature, which the Increaſe of Knowledge was intended for a Remedy againſt. This ſeems to be a ſort of Reaſon, for Men's valuing themſelves ſo highly, upon abſtruſe and uncommon Speculations in general, and in Religion in particular; for laying ſo much more weight, and beſtowing ſo much more Pains, upon the Brightneſs of the Underſtanding, than upon the Rectitude of the Will. Not conſidering in the mean while, how very diſtant theſe Notions are from the End of Religion. For Religion's Buſineſs is to amend the World, by making Men better rather than wiſer; by making them in Truth wiſer, that they may thereby be enabled to be better. Religion's conſtant Voice is

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in Effect that of our bleſſed Maſter, *If ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them.* Since by barely knowing the very beſt things and reſting there, neither are ourſelves, nor others (truly ſpeaking) happier. Religion's higheſt Excellence is to reſtore the defaced Image of our Maker upon our Souls, and by refreſhing that Likeneſs here, to fit us for the Enjoyment of the Original hereafter. But ſtill the manner of provoking us to this Imitation, is by propoſing ſuch of his Excellencies for our Pattern as repreſent, not the Largeneſs of his Mind, but the Purity and Beneficence of his Nature. *As he which hath called you is holy, ſo be ye holy in all manner of Converſation; Becauſe it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy*; and again, *Be ye merciful, as your Father alſo is merciful.* Which Places leave us no Difficulty for underſtanding our Bleſſed Lord's Meaning, though ſomewhat more ambiguouſly expreſs'd, when he commands his Diſciples to *be Perfect, even as* their *Father which is in Heaven is Perfect.*

John xiii. 17.

1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

Luke vi. 36.

Matth. v. 48.

But are we then able to aſpire to ſuch a Likeneſs, even in theſe Reſpects, as ſhould, in any Exactneſs of Proportion, anſwer to thoſe Commands? Is not God in Heaven, and We upon Earth? And can there be any Compariſon between his Luſtre and Glory, who (as the Apoſtle ſays here) *is Light, and in Him is no Darkneſs at all*; and that dim Shine of the brighteſt human Virtue, which, if put in the Balance with Him, is but a very few Removes from Darkneſs? No certainly. And therefore it was, that I propoſed to ſhew under my

Verſe 5.

II. *Second* Head, that even the Holineſs and Purity required under the Goſpel-State, is not ſo abſolute, as to preſerve us, in the preſent Condition of things, free from all manner of Sin. That no mere mortal muſt expect to be ſo happy, is a Thing, that proves itſelf. And therefore, inſtead of thoſe Teſtimonies, whereby the

the Scriptures ſtrengthen this Melancholy Reflection, by aſking, *Who can ſay, I have made my Heart clean, I am pure from my Sin?* But pronouncing, that *there is none righteous, no, not one*; that *there is not a Man upon Earth who doeth good and ſinneth not*; and that *Death hath paſſed upon all Men, in that all have ſinned.* Inſtead, I ſay, of theſe, and many ſuch-like, though full and undeniable, yet ſomewhat more foreign Proofs; I would make ſhorter work, by ſending Men to their own Breaſts for Conviction. For he, that at all acquaints himſelf, what paſſes at home, muſt be exceeding partial and vain, not to ſee Cauſe for including his own Caſe, in the Number of Them, to whom thoſe Words of this Apoſtle belong, *If we ſay that we have no Sin, we deceive ourſelves, and the Truth is not in us.*

Prov. xx. 9. Pſal. xiv. 1. Eccleſ. vii. 20. Rom. v. 12.

That then, which I apprehend of much greater Importance, is to put Men in Mind, whence that Unhappineſs proceeds. Of which it may ſuffice to give this ſhort Account.

God, as the *Preacher* very well obſerves, *made Man upright, but they have ſought out many Inventions.* Our firſt Parents were left in the Hand of their own Counſel, free to fall, but yet able to ſtand. This Power of perfect Choice, abuſed to Evil, was ſo ordered, as to draw on, not only perſonal Guilt, but a Depravation, both of the Underſtanding and Affections. After theſe Infirmities, thus contracted, it was, that all Mankind ſprung from them: Who conſequently muſt partake of the Filth and Frailties of their common Source. So that none of their Poſterity are any longer the ſame, that either *Adam* was at firſt, or that *Eve* was, who took her Subſtance from him, before he had tranſgreſs'd. The Appetites of the lower Soul (as ſome diſtinguiſh) are in perpetual Diſpoſition to rebel; and there is a Biaſs, even upon Reaſon itſelf, drawing us down to the Animal Life and its Gratifications, againſt our better Senſe, and the much more

Eccleſ. vii. 29.

weighty

weighty Arguments, that plead, but are not ſo well heard, for the Spiritual. In the Latter conſiſts our Duty and Happineſs, in the Former, our Guilt and Danger. Our Danger at all Times; becauſe by indulging our ſenſual Appetites, even within meaſure, they are apt to get Ground upon us; Our Guilt, as many times as we gratify them, beyond meaſure, or in oppoſition to the Dictates of Reaſon and Religion. This renders our Lord's Reflection upon his Diſciples applicable to all his Followers, that, in the Hour of Temptation, Watchfulneſs and Prayer are indiſpenſably neceſſary, becauſe even when *the Spirit is* moſt *willing*, *the Fleſh is* found by ſad Experience *weak*. This is in Subſtance St. *Paul*'s meaning, by the *Warrings of the Mind*, *the Luſtings of the Spirit againſt the Fleſh*, and *the Fleſh againſt the Spirit*, of which he often complains. And the Difference between one Man and another, in this reſpect, is not, that the Bad have theſe Luſtings and Weakneſſes, and the Good have not; that the Bad are always vanquiſhed in the War, and the Good never: But that the One follows the Stream of his vitiated Affections, and the Other ſtrives againſt it. The Bad takes part with the Enemy againſt himſelf, and the Good either withſtands ſo manfully as to conquer; Or, if overcome by Surprize, or violent Aſſaults, rallies again; and never makes the leaſt Truce with a Foe, from whom nothing, he knows can ſave him, but continual and obſtinate Reſiſtance.

Matt. xxvi. 41.

Rom. vii. 23. Gal. v. 16, 17.

Hence it is, that *in many things we offend all*; In many, done amiſs, which ought not, need not, to have been committed: In Many, not done well, which might have been performed, and ſhould not have been neglected. And, all this notwithſtanding, we are called upon to *walk in the Light*, *as God is in the Light*, becauſe the keeping ſo glorious an Example in view will animate our Endeavours, after the utmoſt Perfection we are capable of attaining. And we are eſteemed to *walk*

Jam. iii. 2.

Ver. 6.

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in the Light, as He is in the Light, when we avoid and abhor Darkneſs and its Deeds; and ſo demean ourſelves, that our Blemiſhes and Faults are not from the Perverſeneſs of our Will, but from the Imperfections and Frailties of our Nature. For, were there no ſuch Diſtinction, as this to be made, how fruitleſs, how impertinent were it for St. *John*, to tell Men of a *Fellowſhip with God and Chriſt*; *A Fellowſhip* to be maintained by being like to God; and yet, to tell theſe Men, that they are Sinners: It therefore follows evidently, that all Sinners, in the largeſt Senſe of that Word, are not ſhut out from the Advantages of the Goſpel, which makes it of great Uſe rightly to underſtand my

III. *Third* Head. What Methods thoſe Advantages are ſecured by, notwithſtanding the Remains of Sin, which do, and always will, cleave to the very beſt of Chriſtians, while they continue here upon Earth. Of this we are informed, *Ver.* 7. *The Blood of Jeſus Chriſt his Son cleanſeth us from all Sin:* and yet ſomewhat more particularly at the 9th Verſe, *If we confeſs our Sins, he is faithful and juſt to forgive us our Sins, and to cleanſe us from all Unrighteouſneſs.* The Sum of both which Texts may be reduced to Two Points: One, That to the alone Sufferings and Death of Chriſt Men's Deliverance from their Sins, and the diſmal Conſequents of them, is truly owing: The Other, That this Deliverance is not afforded to all Sinners promiſcuouſly, but requires ſome Conditions to qualify us for it. Theſe are, each of them, Points too copious to be treated of in their due extent at preſent, and therefore I will but juſt leave them upon you with ſome brief Obſervations: Such eſpecially, as are moſt appoſite to what hath been delivered, under the foregoing Particulars.

1. *Firſt*, As the Effect of *Chriſt's Blood* is here repreſented by *Cleanſing*, it argues, not only, that Sin is the Stain and Defilement of our Nature, but refers us alſo to the Sprinklings of the Blood of the Levitical Sacrificers, for a right Underſtanding of the Benefit Chriſtians reap by

by it. Now the Legal Pollutions, under that Oeconomy, did cut Men off from all Friendſhip with God, till the Luſtrations, appointed for each Caſe, had paſs'd upon the Body of the Perſon contracting them. In like manner, our Souls are looked upon as ſullied, and abominable in the Sight of God, till the Application of the Blood of this only meritorious Sacrifice hath waſhed them from their Filth. Again, The Mark of Men being then in Favour and Friendſhip with God was their Right of coming into his Preſence, approaching his Altar, and communicating in his Worſhip, with the reſt of their Brethren: And thus Chriſtians, under the Goſpel, are then in Communion with God, when they lead ſuch Lives, as qualify them for an acceptable Participation, in thoſe Services and Privileges, which are the Glory of the true Members of Chriſt's Body, the Church. This makes it, upon the Matter, Indifferent, whether we read thoſe Words at the Seventh Verſe, *Then have we Fellowſhip with one another*, or (as ſome Copies) *Then have we Fellowſhip with Him:* Since Communion with true Chriſtians is Communion with God; and They, *who walk not in the Light*, that is, who lead not the Lives of Chriſtians, however they may ſeem to be, yet are not really, united, either to the One, or the Other.

2. *Secondly*, There is this Pre-eminence due to the Blood of Jeſus Chriſt, above any thing directly typified of it, by the Purifications under the Law: That, whereas Thoſe had all a reſpect to Faults already paſs'd, This looks forward; and is of mighty Efficacy for the Time to come. It was our Propitiation, and thus it procures our Pardon from the Guilt of Sin; but it hath likewiſe purchaſed for us the Grace and Aſſiſtances of the Holy Spirit, and thus it arms and relieves us againſt the Power of Sin. For this Spirit is the Earneſt and Proof of our Adoption: The *ſending* it *forth into our Hearts* is expreſly ſaid to be a Conſequence of our Sonſhip. But that Sonſhip is again the Conſequence of our

Rom. viii. 15. Gal. iv. 3, 4, 5, 6.

Deliverance

Deliverance from Bondage; And this Deliverance is as expreſly aſcribed to that Death of His, which deſtroyed Him, that had the Power of Death, and, till this had burſt our Chains, held us in Fear and Slavery. So truly may that Blood be ſaid to *cleanſe*, whoſe Vertue does not only waſh out the Old, but preſerve us from returning to our Mire, and prevents the taking New, Stains. Heb. ii. 14, 15.

3. *Thirdly*, This ſhews us the exceeding Goodneſs, as well as the Juſtice, of Almighty God, in contriving ſuch Means for reſtoring our Happineſs, as leave no reaſonable Imputation upon the Hardſhip of loſing it. The Defects and Diſabilities, which indiſpoſe us to Goodneſs, and render a perfect Obedience now impoſſible, were derived down to us from another: The Repair of theſe Ruins of Nature by Grace, The Acceptance of an Obedience imperfect, when ſincere, The Remiſſion of our Faults, and Compaſſion for our Failings, are likewiſe derived down upon us from Another. The Miſery was not perſonally our own Act; the Reſcue from it is not our own neither. Thus far the Caſes are at leaſt equal, and the Juſtice of God vindicated. But the Differences, which illuſtrate his Goodneſs upon this Occaſion, are manifeſt and great. The Offence, by which Judgment came upon us, was One, was actually Another's, and ours, only as naturally included in that common Repreſentative. But the Righteouſneſs, by which Juſtification comes upon us, is not that of any natural Parent. It is no farther Ours, than as we are, by a moſt gracious Conſtruction, reckoned to partake with Him, not from whom We came, but who came to Us; One, who condeſcended to aſſume our Human, that ſo we might be admitted to a Share of His Divine Nature. Nor was this Juſtification from Our Original alone, but from Actual, from our Own, from Wilful, from Infinite, as the Apoſtle ſays here, *from All, Sin.* At leaſt it may, it muſt be ſo, provided we be not wanting to ourſelves. For that ſhould be Rom. v. 12, *to* 19.

taken Care of. We have done a great deal to make ourſelves wretched, and to break with God; and ſomething is ſtill left for us to do, in order to retrieving our Bliſs, and returning into Friendſhip with Him: And how inexcuſable we are, if this be left undone, will appear

4. *Fourthly*, From the Condition required at the 9th Verſe, *If we confeſs our Sins, he is faithful and juſt to forgive us our Sins, and to cleanſe us from all Unrighteouſneſs.* That the true Purport of this Condition be not miſtaken, it is fit we remember, that nothing is more uſual in Scripture, than to expreſs a Man's Duty by ſome very conſiderable Branch of it. Thus the Whole of Religion is often implied, in the Love, or the Fear, of God. And thus Confeſſion here no doubt denotes, not only an Acknowledgment of our Faults, but all that deep Humility and Shame, All that afflicting Sorrow and Self-condemnation, All that Reſolution againſt them, All that effectual forſaking them for the future, All that Diligence to grow, and abound, in the contrary Virtues and Graces, All that entire Dependence on the Merits and Sacrifice of our crucified Redeemer, All that Application of his Word and Sacraments, ordained to convey this cleanſing Blood to us; which accompany ſuch Acknowledgment, when ſerious and to purpoſe, and which are elſewhere repreſented, as conſtituent Parts of Repentance, and neceſſary Prediſpoſitions to Forgiveneſs. In the mean while, as the mention of this ſingly was ſufficient, ſo was no Part of Repentance ſo proper to be mentioned as This. For it was directed to Perſons vain and abſurd enough, to ſuppoſe themſelves void of Sin, and thereby evacuating, ſo far as in them lay, the whole Goſpel of Chriſt. For the Goſpel propounds a Salvation to all Men, to be obtained only by his Death. A Death, undergone on purpoſe that it might propitiate for Sin, and conſequently a Death, needleſs to them who had no Sin. A Death of none effect to Any, who do not allow the Neceſſity, and truſt to the Virtue, of it, for the Remiſſion of their

own Sins. But to all who do, ſo beneficial, that God can as ſoon renounce his Word, as diſappoint their reaſonable Expectations. His Promiſe is paſs'd, and He is *faithful.* The Judge of all the Earth cannot but do right. His Son hath paid the Debt, and He is *Juſt.* He will not therefore require from the Principal what the Surety hath already diſcharged. So ſure are we to be happy, if we be but ſenſible, how miſerable we have made ourſelves. So ſure to be miſerable, if puffed up with vain Confidence in our own real Impotence; and inſenſible, that to *Jeſus Chriſt* alone, we owe the very Poſſibility of our being happy.

Let then theſe Conſiderations be ſo laid together, that the Reſult of them all may be that Fulneſs of a ſolid and well grounded Joy, which the Apoſtle of this Day deſigned the Words, from whence they have been taken, ſhould diffuſe, through every Soul that receives them. Let us hold in higheſt Eſtimation that Privilege, which is indeed ineſtimable; The Myſtical Union with God the Father and his Bleſſed Son; The moſt valuable Ingredient of a Believer's both preſent and future Happineſs, and therefore the beſt Ingredient of his preſent, becauſe the Earneſt and undoubted Pledge, of his future, and eternal. But let us conſider withal, that to be united to God ſuppoſes a Likeneſs to him, in all thoſe Excellencies that are imitable by Creatures; and in all thoſe Proportions, to which ſuch Creatures as We, can raiſe our poor imperfect, and ſtill ſinful, ſelves. For ſuch, we muſt remember, we yet are, even after our moſt ſincere, our moſt ſucceſsful, Endeavours to be Holy. And therefore, as we muſt not preſume upon the Promiſes and Love of God, *without cleanſing ourſelves from all filthineſs of Fleſh and Spirit, and perfecting Holineſs in his Fear*: 2 Cor. vii. 1. So neither muſt we forget, that all our Cleanneſs is from *Him, who hath waſhed us in his own Blood*; Rev. i. 5. that Humility, and taking ſhame for our Sins, and acknowledging our own Unworthineſs, as they are moſt ſuitable to our Circumſtances, ſo are they moſt for our Advantage. There being no

Inſtance, which does more remarkably, than this of recommending to the Favour, and intitling to the Mercy of God, make good that Maxim of our Bleſſed Maſter, *He that exalteth himſelf ſhall be abaſed, and he that humbleth himſelf ſhall be exalted.*

Luke xiv. 11.

And, if theſe Conſiderations, and their Effects, can be more ſeaſonable at one time than another; Is there any fitter Opportunity for them, than the Feſtival we now celebrate? When the beloved Diſciple does, as it were, again lean on his Lord's Breaſt; and join our Praiſes for the Virtue of the Servant, with our Adorations for the Birth of the Maſter? That Birth, which was ſo circumſtantiated, as to intimate how deteſtable Sin and Senſuality is to Him; That Birth, which *manifeſted the Life*, till then *hid in God*, that we might thenceforth live in, and by, and to Him. That Birth, which is ſo full of Confuſion to the Proud and Arrogant; to thoſe that do not, or that will not, ſee their Vileneſs and Frailty; But ſo full of Comfort, and Holy Truſt to the Penitent and the Humble. For, them, that feel and acknowledge their own Miſery and Pollution, this new-born Saviour will cleanſe by his Blood; Them, that lament and labour againſt their own Infirmities, he will aſſiſt and ſtrengthen by his Grace. Let us then caſt ourſelves entirely upon Him, who, had he not loved us, would neither have taken, nor ſhed, his Blood for us. Approach him, as your only Truſt and Refuge. For, what elſe can you place your Confidence in? Not in Men, though they may appear to be ſomething, for no *Man may redeem the Soul of his Brother, or make Atonement unto God for him.* Not in Yourſelves, whom you may ſoon know to be nothing. Nothing at the beſt, ſince all the Evil in you is worſe than ſo, and all the Good is no better than ſo. For, let you *have laboured* never ſo *abundantly*, ſtill *it was not you, but the Grace of God that is in you.* A Grace given to the Humble; a Spiritual Suſtenance, of which the

Pſal. xlix. 7.

1 Cor. xv. 10.

the *Poor in Heart ſhall eat and be ſatisfied, and their Soul ſhall live for ever*; while the conceitedly Rich and Full, the Men who think they want it not, though then they want it moſt, ſhall be ſent empty away. Shut not then the Door of Mercy againſt yourſelves, by falſe Notions of your own Righteouſneſs: But give the Glory of your cleanſing to that ineſtimable Blood, which alone can take away Sin; and be careful ſo to value the Bleſſing, as never to forfeit again that Fellowſhip, *which the Father and his Son Jeſus Chriſt* hereby vouchſafe to receive you into. A Fellowſhip of Holineſs here; But that, alas! imperfect, and too often interrupted; Yet this to be compleated in a Fellowſhip hereafter in Heaven, of Happineſs immutable, endleſs, and inexpreſſible. Whither God of his infinite Mercy bring us in his due time, to whom be Honour and Glory henceforth for evermore. *Amen.*

The GOSPEL.

St. John xxi. 19.

PARAPHRASE.

19. *JESUS ſaid unto Peter, Follow me.*

19. After Jeſus had thrice required from *Peter* a Profeſſion of loving him (thus to make ſome ſort of Reparation for his having thrice denied him) and foretold his Martyrdom, for the Glory of God, and the Truth of the Goſpel; He riſeth out of his Place, and, putting himſelf into Motion, commands *Peter* to follow him.

20. *Then Peter turning about, ſeeth the diſciple whom Jeſus loved, following, (which alſo leaned on his breaſt at ſupper) and ſaid, Lord, which he is that betrayeth thee?*

20. *Peter* did as he was bidden, and *John*, (for he is the Perſon meant here) though not bidden, did ſo too.

21. *Peter ſeeing him, ſaith to Jeſus, Lord, and what ſhall this Man do?*

21. Which *Peter* obſerving, and being curious to know, how a Perſon ſo familiar with, and particularly dear to our Lord, ſhould be diſpoſed of, aſks what ſhould become of him.

22. To this Queſtion Jeſus did not think fit to return any direct Anſwer; But ſuch an one, as check'd St. *Peter*'s Curioſity, by commanding him to look well to the diſcharge of his own Duty, without troubling himſelf about the Fate in reſerve for other People; which was no part of his Concern.

22. *Jeſus ſaith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.*

23. From this ambiguous manner of our Lord's expreſſing himſelf, ſome of the Diſciples imagined, that St. *John* ſhould never die, but be found among thoſe that ſhall be alive at Chriſt's Second Coming. (See 1 Cor. xv. 1, 52. 1 *Theſſ.* iv. 17.) Whereas, in Truth, thoſe Words of *Jeſus* imply no ſuch Matter (but if they determine any thing, which they ſeem rather not to do) foretel, that that Diſciple ſhould ſurvive the Deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*; which is probably believed to be called our Lord's Coming (as a moſt eminent Judgment, an Inſtance of his Truth and Power) in ſundry Places of the New Teſtament.

23. *Then went this ſaying abroad among the brethren, that that diſciple ſhould not die: yet Jeſus ſaid not unto him, He ſhall not die; but if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?*

24. Now the Perſon, concern'd in the Account that went before, is the very Author of this Goſpel; whoſe Credit may very ſafely be depended upon.

24. *This is the diſciple which teſtifieth of theſe things, and wrote theſe things, and we know that his Teſtimony is true.*

25. For he hath been ſo far from exceeding, that he does indeed come ſhort of the Truth. The Miracles and memorable Actions related here, being ſo ſmall a part of thoſe done by Jeſus; that (to uſe a Figure of Speech very common and allowable on ſuch Occaſions) the whole of them is not poſſible to be told; or to be comprehended if it could be told.

25. *And there are alſo many other things which Jeſus did, the which, if they ſhould be written, every one, I ſuppoſe that even the World itſelf could not contain the books that ſhould be written.*

COMMENT.

IN order to do right, both to the Feſtival, which the Church of Chriſt this Day celebrates, and to the Portion of Scripture propounded here, as a proper Subject

Subject for our Meditation upon it, I ſhall firſt give a brief Account of the Saint we are now commemorating, and then conſider this Paſſage, ſo far as it concerns Him in particular.

St. *John* was the Son of *Zebedee*, and Brother of *James*, called (by diſtinction from another of the ſame Name, and an Apoſtle likewiſe) *James the Great*. His Mother was *Salome*, mentioned by St. *Mark* to have been one of thoſe devout Women, who, having miniſtered to *Jeſus* in *Galilee*, and waited on him in his Journey from thence to *Jeruſalem*, were preſent at his Crucifixion, and prepared Spices to anoint his dead Body. But, when they came with that Intent to the Sepulchre, they ſaw a Viſion of Angels, who gave them the firſt joyful News of his being riſen again. The Place of his Birth was one of the Sea-Towns in *Galilee*, probably *Bethſaida*, or *Capernaum* There he, together with his Father and Brother, exerciſed the Fiſhing-Trade, till called off by our Lord, to be from thenceforth one of his conſtant Attendants, for the ready Obedience to which Call, (expreſs'd by *leaving his Ship and his Father* and forthwith following *Jeſus*) he ſeems to have been prepared, by the previous Inſtructions of *John* the Baptiſt. It being probably concluded from the manner of his Speech, when he hath occaſion to mention himſelf in the Goſpel of his own writing, that He was *that other Diſciple*, who is ſaid, in the Firſt Chapter, to have been preſent with *Andrew*, when *John* declared *Jeſus* to be *the Lamb of God*, and thereupon to have followed him, to the Place of his Abode. But afterwards, 'tis certain, he returned to his Calling. And therefore this Invitation, and the Compliance with it, was quite different, both in Time and Nature, from that at the Sea of *Galilee*. For our Saviour had then actually entered upon the Exerciſe of his Prophetick Office; and made Choice of Him, and his Brother

Matth. iv. 21. Mark xv. 40. xvi. 1. *Compare* Matt. xxvii. 56.

Matt. iv. 21, 22.

John i. 35, *to* 40.

James, among those Disciples, which he began to gather to himself.

Among these, he was not only one of the Twelve Apostles; but One of the Three, even of that Number, distinguished by particular Marks of Favour above the rest. To these, that is, to *Peter*, this Apostle, and his Brother *James*, our Blessed Lord gave Sirnames. To these Two Brethren, that of *Sons of Thunder*; denoting, possibly, the Powerfulness of their Ministry. Which Title might have regard, Either to its Efficacy upon the Minds of the Hearers; Or to the undaunted Courage of the Speakers; Or to the Depth of those Mysteries they should teach, as from the *Voice of God*; for so Thunder was wont to be esteem'd and call'd. To These our Lord allow'd a part, in some of those more private Miracles and Retirements, to which the other Apostles had not the Honour of being admitted. Thus, in the restoring *Jairus*'s Daughter to Life, *when he came to the House, no Man was suffered to go in with him, save Peter, and James, and John, and the Father and Mother of the Maiden.* When he thought fit to exhibit a *Specimen* of the Excellence of his Glory, in his wonderful Transfiguration on the Holy Mount; These were made choice of to be *Eye-witnesses of his Majesty*, present at his Conference with *Moses* and *Elias*, and Hearers of that Voice, which declared him the *beloved Son of God.* And again, when the Sorrows of his Soul were enlarged, and his Human Nature almost overwhelmed, with the Load of Sufferings which he saw then attacking him; These were the only Companions of his Solitude, and most retired Devotions. Thus whatever was most remarkable in their Blessed Master's Actions, which he saw convenient for a Season to conceal, was deposited as a Secret in these faithful Hands. The most convincing Evidences of his Godhead and his Manhood, the brightest Lustre of the One, and the lowest Humiliation of the Other.

Mark iii. 16, 17.

Luke viii. 51.

Matth. xvii. 2 Pet. i. 16, 17, 18.

Matth. xxvi.

Mark v. 43. Matth. xvii. 9.

All

All indeed, that could ſpeak a particular Confidence and Kindneſs, was reſerved for a retreat with thoſe ſelect Friends; Of whom, though ſo few, St. *John* had conſtantly the Privilege to make One.

Nay, even of thoſe Three, he ſeems, in ſome Reſpects, to have the Preference. To be known by that moſt deſirable of all Titles, *The Diſciple whom Jeſus loved*; To have ſuch Intimacy and Intereſt with this Bleſſed Maſter, as ſhould put the reſt of his Brethren upon chuſing Him their Spokeſman, for getting Satisfaction to a Queſtion, which none of Them durſt aſk, though all were in pain to have it reſolved. Theſe were ſuch Honours as St. *John* might well deſire to be remembered by. Ten thouſand pompous Titles had ſwell'd indeed his Goſpel, but in Subſtance added nothing to the Character of the Author, or the Credit of the Work, comparable to this ſhort Deſcription of himſelf in the Scripture now under Conſideration, *The Diſciple whom Jeſus loved, which alſo leaned on his Breaſt at Supper, and ſaid, which is He that betrayeth thee? This is the Diſciple which teſtifieth of theſe things, and wrote theſe things.* But of this I may have occaſion to take notice by and by. At preſent I only add, that a more convenient Proof of his particular Affection could ſcarce be given, than that of committing to this Diſciple's Comfort and Care his Sorrowful Holy Mother; The tendereſt Concern of that kind to be ſure, and ſuch, as even the Agonies of Death and the Croſs, could not yet render the beſt and meekeſt of Sons unmindful of.

Ver. 20, 24.

John xix. 26.

What the Reaſons might be of our Lord's Favour to St. *John*, in a Degree ſo viſible and ſo particular, as ſhould give him a Right to a Title, which otherwiſe it would have ſavoured too much of invidious and arrogant boaſting, to aſſume to himſelf, we are no-where in Scripture told. Of thoſe, who have undertaken to conjecture, Some have attributed it to this Apoſtle's eminent Modeſty, Others to his unſpotted Chaſtity, Others think it an Indulgence due to his Youth, and the

Pregnancy

Pregnancy of that in Knowledge and Virtue; But None ſeem to have thought more probably of the Matter, than they, who impute this Affection and Indulgence, to nearneſs of Relation, and a peculiar Sweetneſs of Diſpoſition, conſpiring to recommend him. The Former, though ſo cloſe, as that of being Siſter's, or Couſin-German's Son to our Lord, had not alone indeed been Cauſe ſufficient, for Preference in the good Graces of ſuch a Maſter. (The ſignifying this might poſſibly be part of our Lord's Meaning, in his Anſwer to that Famous Requeſt of this Apoſtle and his Mother, to be conſidered hereafter * in due Place.) But the Latter, wherein both the conſtant Strain of his own Writings, and the concurrent Teſtimonies of all Antiquity, declare him to have excelled; might well be allowed to render him very dear to that Lord, who is Love itſelf. And ſuch Likeneſs of Diſpoſition, attended with ſuch Proximity in Blood, As it is a natural and reaſonable Motive, for ſome Difference to be made; (and therefore not unbecoming even the Son of God made Man.) So was it no Diſparagement to the reſt of the Apoſtles, whoſe Circumſtances in either of theſe reſpects were not alike, that a greater Intimacy and Freedom uncommon ſhould be permitted to St. *John*. Thus He, who *loved all his own, and loved them unto the End*, did yet diſcover ſomewhat of Inequality in his Likings and Converſations; Enough to prove himſelf of the ſame Human Affections with Us; Enough to juſtify One, from among his moſt familiar Friends, in the Honour of ſignalizing his Memory to all Ages, and leaving no Manner of doubt who was pointed at, by *The Diſciple whom Jeſus loved.*

Matth. xx. 20, 23.

* *Goſpel for St. James's Day.*

John xiii. 1.

But, though the Holy Ghoſt did not think fit to acquaint us with the particular Motives, he hath not ſpared to record the grateful Reſentments, of this Love. Thoſe were expreſs'd in many Inſtances of fervent Zeal for the Honour, Returns of Tenderneſs for the Perſon, and undaunted Courage in the Service, of ſo kind a Maſter.

Maſter. The Firſt of theſe indeed we find our Lord twice rebuking. Once, as too nicely jealous, when forbidding one to proceed in caſting out Devils, tho' he did it in Chriſt's Name, becauſe he was not one of his Retinue. A ſecond time, when the Affront of not receiving *Jeſus* in a *Samaritan* Village, had provoked His, and his Brother's Indignation, to aſk whether Fire ſhould not be call'd down from Heaven, to make them ſuch another Example of deſpiſing a Great Prophet, as God had once ſuffered *Elijah* to make, of ſome, who contemned his Authority. In both which Caſes, this Heat muſt be aſcribed to the over-haſtineſs of an honeſt, but not ſufficiently inſtructed, Zeal; And our Lord's Reproofs accordingly ſhew ſuch want of Temper to have proceeded, from want of ſuch Judgment and Conſideration; as afterwards calmed this Diſciple into Meekneſs and Charity, and left him ſo far from deſiring to promote his Maſter's Honour, by the Danger and Death of Others; as to declare it his Duty, to purchaſe the Lives and Safeties of the Brethren with the Sacrifice of his own; and this too, as the beſt and moſt becoming Expedient, for approving the Sincerity of his Gratitude and Love to Chriſt.

Luke ix. 49, 50.

Ver. 51, 56.

2 Kings i.

1 John iii. 16. iv. 11.

The tender Concern he bore to his Lord's Perſon, appears abundantly from his Behaviour, at a time moſt proper for making Proof of it: That of his Maſter's Sufferings and Diſgrace. And here I will not Venture to carry this Proof ſo high as ſome have done, by affirming St. *John* to be that Young Man, who, when *Jeſus* was apprehended in the Garden, followed with a Linnen Cloth caſt about his Body, and afterwards eſcaped from thoſe in purſuit of him, by quitting his Garment, and fleeing naked. As the Scripture hath not, So the Reaſons of thoſe that have, fixed this upon St. *John*, are not, to my Apprehenſion, ſufficient to balance thoſe on the contrary. The Name of *Young Man*, as commonly then uſed, could

Mark xiv. 51.

could not well belong to St. *John*. Who, dying about Sixty-eight Years after our Lord, by Computation the Ninety-eighth or Ninety-ninth of his own Age, must have been now upwards of Thirty; tho' younger than any other of the Apostles. Not only so, but this Apostle himself tells us, Our Lord treated with the Officers, for the safe Dismission of those with him; And that Allowance They took the Advantage of. For, after the time of *Simon Peter*'s wounding the High-Priest's Servant, and the Wound healed by our Saviour, is to be understood the Disciples shifting for themselves to follow, as St. *Mark* hath placed it. And that general Expression seems to include St. *John*, when the same Evangelist, as the Verse before, says, *They all*, that is, (as St. *Matthew*) *all the Disciples forsook him and fled.* Whereupon immediately follows this Account of the Young Man; such as, I should imagine, refers not to the Particulars of the Flight of One among the *All* before-mentioned; but rather to a Person and Action distinct from Theirs, and another Incident, that happened at the seizing of Jesus by *Judas* and his Company.

Mark xiv. 50.
Matt. xxvi. 56.
See Cajetan. Jentac. vi. Qu. 4.

Some greater Appearance there is (whether we regard the Phrase used in relating it, or the Authority of those Interpreters who give into it) that St. *John* was that other Disciple who accompanied *Peter* to the High-Priest's Palace; and, by his Acquaintance in the Family, got him admitted in, to see what was done to *Jesus*. Tho' his Affection, which had brought him thither, was, St. *Chrysostom* thinks, too weak for his Fear; and that he could not yet conquer this so far, as to suffer himself to stay in a Place of so much Danger.

John xviii. 15, 16.
Compare Chap. xx. 3, 4, 8.

However that were, we find him afterwards more Master of this Passion; attending our blessed Lord at his Crucifixion, in Company with his Holy and Afflicted Mother; taken Notice of by him in his last Moments and dying Agonies, receiving that Mother as his own Charge,

John xix. 26, 27.

and

and conducting her to his own home. With whom, ſome Hiſtorians tell us, he lived in *Jeruſalem*, till the time of her Death, which they compute to have been about Fifteen Years after.

After our Saviour's Reſurrection, He was the firſt Apoſtle, who came to his empty Tomb; running thither, upon the Intelligence brought to Him and *Peter*, that the Stone was taken away, and the Sepulchre open; And, out-running *Peter*, tho' not entering into it, till *Peter* had firſt led the way. But then he alſo took a careful View of all the Circumſtances of the Place, the Clothes, and the Manner how they were diſpoſed; and, upon his return profeſs'd the full Conviction, which this View had given him. John xx. 3, 8.

When our Lord appeared to his Diſciples at the Sea of *Galilee*, He was the firſt who diſcerned it was Jeſus; and gave notice of it to *Simon Peter*, between Whom and Him, there ſeems to have been all along a more particular Intimacy and Friendſhip. At St. *Peter*'s Requeſt it was, that *John* undertook to aſk of our Lord, who it was that ſhould betray him. And in Concern for *John* it was, that *Peter*, when given to underſtand by what Death he himſelf ſhould glorify God, had the unreaſonable Curioſity, to demand what that Man ſhould do. Theſe were the Two, ſent by our Lord before him to prepare the Paſſover; Theſe the Two, ſought out by *Mary Magdalene*, to impart the News of the Grave being open: Theſe the Two, who after the Deſcent of the Holy Spirit, went up together into the Temple, and there cured the impotent Man; Theſe juſtified their preaching in the Name of *Jeſus*, and declared their Reſolution to perſiſt in doing ſo; ſuffered Impriſonment with the reſt of their Brethren, rejoiced, that they were counted worthy of Shame upon ſo glorious an Occaſion: Theſe were made choice of by the reſt of John xxi. 6. John xiii. 24. John xxi. 21. Luke xxii. 8. John xx. 2. Acts iii, iv, v. Chap. viii.

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their Body, to go and Confirm the new Converts at *Samaria*, who had been inſtructed in the Faith of Chriſt, by the preaching of *Philip*. And, *Laſtly*, Theſe Two and *James* are ſaid to be eſteemed Pillars. From Them, St. *Paul* declares, he received the right hand of Fellowſhip at *Jeruſalem*; and, that with them it was agreed, what part he ſhould take in the Propagation of the Goſpel. All which are Inſtances, that ſpeak a more than ordinary Union between theſe Two Yoke-Fellows, a mighty Deference to their Authority, and an invincible Courage putting them forward, and, as it were, leading on their Brethren, as oft as any Encounter of Hardſhip, for the Service of their Maſter, offered itſelf to them. And This is the *Third* good Quality I inſtanced in, as a Teſtimony, how deſirous our Apoſtle was to make ſome becoming Returns of that Love, whereof he partook ſo largely.

Gal. ii. 9, 10.

No doubt he did the ſame, in the ſucceeding Years of his Life. Tho' the Scripture have left us no farther Intimation of it, than that Addreſs, made to the Churches of the leſſer *Aſia*; Which makes it probable, that his Labours had been beſtow'd in founding Some, and confirming Others, of them. Of the Latter ſort might poſſibly be *Laodicea*. But certainly * *Epheſus* was, where we read of St. *Paul* firſt propagating the Goſpel, and leaving the Care of the Church there to *Timothy*, the firſt Biſhop of it. The other Five, mentioned in the *Revelation*, are generally thought to derive their Being from St. *John*: Who is likewiſe believed to have preached in *Parthia*: His firſt Epiſtle anciently bearing the Title of, *The Epiſtle to the Parthians*. His chief Reſidence ſeems to have been at *Epheſus*. A City of exceeding great reſort, both upon account of its Traffick, and the Convenience of its Port, to Travellers, from the Parts of *Syria* and *Egypt*; or thither from *Greece*, *Macedonia*, and *Pontus*, &c. So that the Apoſtle could no where be ſeated more commodiouſly, for diſperſing the

* Iren. Lib. iii. Cap. 3. Acts xix. 1 Tim. i.

the Knowledge of his Doctrines, to Natives of ſeveral Nations, and Quarters, at once.

After many (ſome ſay twenty-ſeven) Years ſpent here, he was, by Order of *Domitian*, (who had then ſet on foot a ſevere Perſecution) ſent to *Rome*; and there, as *Tertullian* relates (in a manner importing the Fact abundantly notorious) caſt into a Cauldron of burning *Oil. But God, who had reſerved him for farther Services to the Truth, brought him ſafe out of it. The Emperor, unmoved at this miraculous Deliverance, baniſh'd him into *Patmos*, a ſmall Iſland in the *Archipelago*. Here it was, that thoſe Viſions were, many of them, if not all, manifeſted to him; and here, that the Ancients ſay, they were written too, in that Book called his *Revelation*. For the Place, we have his own Teſtimony; for the Time that of *Irenæus*, who puts it near the End of *Domitian*'s Reign. But a modern Critick of great Name, ſuppoſes part of thoſe Viſions to have been both ſeen, and written, at *Epheſus*, whither he returned, in the Reign of *Nerva*. During this ſecond Reſidence it was, that he wrote this Goſpel at the Requeſt of the *Aſian* Biſhops. Relating therein ſeveral Paſſages of our Saviour's Life (particularly in the Beginning of his Miniſtry) which the Other Evangeliſts had omitted; and ſetting himſelf to prove the eternal Exiſtence of the *Word*, or Son of God, in oppoſition to the Hereſies of *Ebion* and *Cerinthus*, and the *Nicolaitans*, who denied our Lord's Divinity. About the ſame time his Epiſtles are thought to have been written; The Firſt whereof, with what Deſign hath been obſerved before.

* Tertull. *calls it* Oleum igneum, Lib. de Præſcript. cont. Hæret.

Rev. i. 9.

Lib. v. c. 30.

Grotius in Apoc.

Euſeb. Hiſt. Lib. iii. Hieron. Script. Eccleſ. Catalog. Iren. L. iii. c. 11.

Here he is ſaid to have avoided the Bath, in which *Cerinthus* waſhed; leſt the Judgment of God ſhould deſtroy him, when found in Company with ſo vile a Heretick. Such Abhorrence had even the beſt Men at that time, ſuch dreadful Apprehenſions of Thoſe, who preſumed

preſumed to deny our Saviour's Divinity; ſo far from allowing them any manner of Countenance, as not to think it either becoming or ſafe, to mingle ſo much as in civil or caſual Converſation, with ſuch impious and profeſſed Enemies to the Truth. Here St. *John* lived to a very old Age, ſome ſay to Ninety-eight or nine, others to a Hundred, or a Hundred and twenty, Years. And, when decayed ſo far, as to be diſabled from longer Exhortations, he uſed in the Publick Aſſemblies, to inculcate this ſhort, but comprehenſive, Leſſon, *Little Children, love one another.* Here, *laſtly*, he died a natural Death, and was buried near the City. A Martyr in Diſpoſition; and ſo far in Fact, as his Impriſonment from the *Jews*, and his Boiling Cauldron, and Baniſhment by the *Romans*, could make him. A wonderful Pattern of Holineſs and Charity, and a Writer ſo profound as to deſerve, by way of Eminence, the Character of St. *John the Divine.* And yet, ſuch was his Humility, that in all his Writings he is remarkable, for never mentioning his own Name; but always ſpeaking of himſelf under ſome ambiguous Title, and of his Character, only as *The Elder*. This Manner of His is thought to have miniſtered Occaſion of Doubt for ſome time, whether the *Second* and *Third* Epiſtles were His, or another *John*'s, commonly known by the Name of *John the Elder*. But the Church, upon mature Deliberation, have received them into the Canon; Moved by the ſeveral Marks, which were thought ſufficient Diſcoveries, of their being dictated by the ſame Spirit, with the other undoubtedly genuine Works of this Divine Author. Let Thus much ſuffice for the *Firſt* Head I propoſed, *viz.* To ſhew, from a very brief Account of this Holy Apoſtle and Evangeliſt in general, what reaſon the Church of Chriſt hath, to pay perpetual Honour to his Memory. I paſs now to conſider, a little more particularly, that ſmall Portion of his Goſpel, appointed to be read on this Occaſion.

Hieron. in Gal. vi. 10.

Euſeb. *Hiſt.* L. iii. c. 28. Hieron. *in Catalog.* Euſeb. L. iii. c. 15.

Now

Now This plainly consists of Two Parts. The One, relating to St. *Peter*, in the Question he asked concerning St. *John*, and the Reproof of such unseasonable and useless Curiosity, with which I forbear at present to concern myself. Partly because I have elsewhere treated of that matter more at large; But chiefly, because it is only introductive of that Other Part, which immediately affects our Evangelist. And therefore, confining my Discourse to This, I shall employ the Remainder of it, upon these few following Observations.

Vid. Serm. Printed 1700. *Serm.* 1.

1. *First*, The Care he takes here, to prevent any Mistakes concerning himself, which might, and did arise, from a Misconstruction of those doubtful Words concerning him, *If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?* Upon this Occasion he acquaints us, there went a *Saying abroad among the Brethren, that That Disciple should not die.* But, how weak and ungrounded such Saying was, the next Period informs us, *Yet Jesus said not unto him He shall not die, but if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to Thee?* To make this Opinion look more probable, The particular Affection of Jesus, the extreme Old Age, by which St. *John* long survived the rest of the Apostles, and the Want of any particular Account of the Manner of his Death, might in some measure contribute. But still all these Arguments, when closely considered, will be found to import no such Matter.

Ver. 22.

Ver. 23.

For, *First*, Whatever Value a Privilege of this Kind might bear with Men, who had but a weak Belief, and imperfect Notions, of a future and better State; Yet, to an Apostle, firm in his Assurance of another Life, satisfied that *to be absent from the Body* was *to be present with the Lord*, exposed to perpetual Dangers and Persecutions during his Continuance here, and detained from the Participation of that Joy, which he knew to be prepared for a Recompence of such Labours and Sufferings: To such a One, I say, the being exempted

from the common Fate of his Brethren, deſerves to be eſteemed not a Privilege, but a Puniſhment. Of which They, who maintain this to be St. *John*'s Caſe, ſeem ſufficiently ſenſible. For, inſtead of acknowledging his Death, they take Refuge in a fabulous Sleep, and a Tranſlation, like that of *Enoch* and *Elias*; for which no authentick Hiſtory furniſhes, and this moſt authentick of all Hiſtories cuts off, any manner of Foundation. In ſuch Fictions as theſe, Men follow their own carnal Senſe of things, and imagine the Pain of Dying to be ſome terrible Calamity, from which it was very agreeable to ſuppoſe a Diſciple, ſo high in his Maſter's Favour, delivered; like that Patriarch, and that Prophet heretofore. But the Apoſtles, and Primitive Chriſtians, had Sentiments very different from Theſe. Thoſe good Men, armed with the Conſolations of the Holy Spirit, and the Supporting Proſpects of the Joy ſet before them, had learnt to deſpiſe, to embrace, to rejoice, to triumph in, Tortures and Death. A future State of Happineſs and Glory reſerved for the juſt, when taken out of this World, is a Point, for which, under a more imperfect Diſpenſation, the Tranſlations of *Enoch* and *Elias* were proper Evidences. But the Tranſlation of an Apoſtle could not be neceſſary, becauſe all Occaſion for ſuch Proofs muſt have ceaſed, to Men, who enjoyed the clearer Revelations of the Goſpel, and who had before an undeniable Atteſtation of this Matter, in the Example of that Jeſus, whom they believe to have been crucified, and dead, to have riſen from the Dead, and to have aſcended into Heaven.

Again, it is eaſy to diſcern the Effects of a wiſe and good Providence, in lengthening out the Age of this Apoſtle, and at laſt taking him away by a Natural Death. The Former furniſhed more abundant Opportunities, for the Influence of his Teaching and Example; and for aſcertaining the Truth to many more eminent Perſons, who ſucceeded in the Church, and had the Advantage of conſulting, and converſing with him. This added to the Weight and Authority of the Three other

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Evangeliſts, whoſe Writings he is expreſly ſaid to have peruſed, and approved. The ſame may reaſonably be preſumed of the Acts and Epiſtles, all which were in being, long before his Deceaſe. This furniſhed us with a more explicit Account of our Lord's Divinity, and the Union of Two Natures in the Perſon of *Jeſus Chriſt*; occaſioned by the Errors of thoſe bold Hereticks, who were his Contemporaries. This ſupplied us with many Facts, wholly omitted; and with more full Relations of Some, not ſo diſtinctly recited, by the Evangeliſts that wrote before him. In a word, This derives mighty Veneration upon the Canon of Scripture; That nothing is received there, but what an Eye and Ear-witneſs of what Jeſus did and ſpoke, did either write himſelf, or declare to be written faithfully, as to the Hiſtorical Part of the Goſpel. And for the Reſt, that the Authors were all dead, and their Treatiſes communicated freely. So that, here was no room for impoſing upon the World, either in Fact, or Doctrine, or Diſcipline; while there remained ſtill living One, who would neither want the Ability, nor the Inclination, to detect the Cheat. And, if we do but reflect at all, we cannot but be ſatisfied, that theſe were mighty Benefits and Strengthenings to the Chriſtian Cauſe. A Cauſe, that ſuffers ſtill from the Perverſeneſs of wicked Seducers, and the Unbelief of ignorant unſettled Minds. But how much more muſt it in likelihood have ſuffered, had not this Apoſtle ſurvived to ſee, and arm us againſt, the Seeds of a Poiſon not yet kill'd; to give Light to them, who might otherwiſe have put on Darkneſs for a Cloke; and to aſſert the true Antiquity of Principles in Religion, which, ſome would fain perſuade us, are only the tyrannical Impoſitions of Councils, or the Cobwebs of later School-men?

And, as the Length of this Apoſtle's Life, ſo the Manner of his Death alſo, had its Uſefulneſs. The going away from Men ſo full of Days, and in perfect Quiet, is, or ought to be, a Warning to the Violent and the Great, the Oppreſſors and Perſecutors of this World;

that there is an over-ruling Power above, which all their Malice cannot defeat: That under the Protection of this Power Good People are, and therefore, farther than This ſees fit to permit, they cannot be prevailed over: That God will never ſuffer his Truth to fail, but get himſelf Glory of all its Enemies. And, on the other Hand, that They who are heartily diſpoſed to ſuffer for their Duty, ſhall not loſe their Crown for not actually doing ſo. St. *John* was, no doubt, eſteemed to *drink of Chriſt's Cup, and to be baptized with his Baptiſm*, though neither beheaded like his Brother *James*, nor crucified like his Companion *Peter*. Let but our Death be the Death of the Saints, and be the Kind what it will, it is certainly precious in the Sight of God.

Theſe ſeem to be very natural Inferences from the Circumſtances of our Apoſtle, and ſubſtantial Reaſons for God's dealing thus with him. But, to build upon theſe an Opinion, of his being an Exception to the Fate of common Mortals, can be imputed to no Cauſe ſo juſtly, as to the Raſhneſs of a prepoſterous Zeal. And to urge the Paſſage now at Hand, in Vindication of that Opinion, is not only to offer manifeſt Violence to the Text, but to fix upon it a Senſe, which the Party concerned declares belonged not to it. It is to advance a Fiction, in deſpight of that ſolemn Warning, which He, according to his uſual Modeſty, hath left, againſt any ſuch foreign and forced Interpretations, as he takes Notice to have already obtained with ſome. But ſuch were then more excuſable than now they can be, after St. *John* had thus forbidden Poſterity to make them.

What remains of this Portion of Scripture, is a Declaration that the Matters contained in the Goſpel, written by St. *John*, may be depended upon for Truth. What we have to this Purpoſe at the *Twenty-fourth Verſe*, is, by ſome Interpreters, ſuppoſed to be ſpoken in the Name of the Church at *Epheſus*, expreſſing their entire Satisfaction in this Point; by Others, as a ſolemn Profeſſion of his own Veracity, made by St. *John* himſelf. It is by no means agreeable to my preſent Deſign

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to enter into critical Diſputes: Eſpecially, where the Conſequence of determining either way is of no greater Account, than here it ſeems to be. Let it ſuffice to ſay then, that in either Acceptation, theſe Two concluding Verſes offer an Argument, for the Truth of this Goſpel, conſiſting of Two Parts. The One, referring to the Perſon that wrote it; The Other, to the Meaſure of that which is written Some little ſhall be ſpoken to each of theſe, and then I have done with the Subject of this Day.

Firſt, Let the Perſon that wrote it be conſidered. One, who, from the beginning of our Lord's Miniſtry, had been his inſeparable Attendant and Companion: One, who had all poſſible Advantages of informing himſelf, not only from thoſe mighty Works, and Divine Diſcourſes, delivered and done publickly; but from the peculiar Favours of a more retired Converſation: One, who lay under no neceſſity of taking up any part of his Report at ſecond hand; and ſo was liable to none of thoſe Miſrepreſentations, common, Either to them who ſtudy to deceive, Or to them who, without Deſign, have often the Misfortune to ſet things in a different Light, merely by varying of Circumſtances and Expreſſions: One, who ſpoke, (as his *Firſt Epiſtle* was obſerved to profeſs) from the Conſent and agreeing Teſtimony of all his Senſes; and that in Matters, of which the Senſes are proper and competent Judges; And, for the reſt, too high for theſe Faculties to reach, One, who was aſſiſted and inſpired by God himſelf, choſen and appointed a Preacher and a Witneſs, and proved a faithful Witneſs by numberleſs Miracles; Such Miracles, as nothing leſs than a Divine Power could perform, ſuch, as were performed, on purpoſe to be Atteſtations to the Doctrines he taught, and therefore ſuch, as leave no room for thinking the Doctrines they confirmed falſe, without the Abſurdities and blaſphemous Imputation, of making God himſelf a Party in the Cheat; One, whoſe Birth and Education never qualified him, for being ſkilled in the Arts of Reaſoning;

much leſs for the cunning Craftineſs of Deceiving; leaſt of all for an attempt ſo daring, an Imagination ſo extravagant, as that of impoſing upon a whole World at once: One, who was convinced himſelf upon the ſame Evidence, which he offered to Others; and who proved the Sincerity of his Conviction effectually, by abandoning all his worldly Intereſts, at an Age, when Men uſe to be moſt ſanguine, and fond of them; And this to follow a Maſter, who made it no Secret, that he had not where to lay his own Head: One, that could not poſſibly have Proſpect of better Intereſt, in things here on Earth, than that he left, however mean it were; but exchanged Safety, and Buſineſs, and unenvied Quiet, for Poverty and Perſecutions, Obloquy and Malice, univerſal Oppoſition, and continual Toil and Danger: One, that could not have been the beloved Diſciple of *the Truth*, *the Way*, and *the Life*, had he ſwerved from Sincerity and Truth: And *Laſtly*, One, for the Weight and Sublimity of whoſe Writings no Man alive is able to account, otherwiſe than from his leaning on that Breaſt, *in which were hid all the Treaſures of Wiſdom and Knowledge.* Being inſtructed, I mean, from above. This, and much leſs than this, no ſober Man excepts againſt, for a ſufficient Inducement to believe, in Other Matters. But in This, alas! this ſingle Affair of Religion, Men think it Prudence to mock their Souls with fancied Difficulties, and object, and cavil themſelves, out of their Salvation. And yet all this (and let as much be produced, if there can, for any other Teſtimony, which is relied upon moſt firmly.) All this, I ſay, and more, comes in, to give Credit and Authority to St. *John.* And it is no over-ſtraining of the Point, when we apply it all to that Character of his Goſpel here, *This is the Diſciple which teſtifieth of theſe things, and wrote theſe things, and we know that his Teſtimony is true.*

2. A *Second* Conſideration, enforcing this Argument, is the Meaſure of that which is written. St. *John*, as was ſaid before, propoſed, as one End of compiling this

this Goſpel, the ſupplying us with ſeveral important Tranſactions in our Saviour's Life, omitted by the other Three Evangeliſts. But, leſt his Enemies ſhould ſuſpect a Favourite Diſciple, to have allowed himſelf too great a Liberty of enlarging upon this Occaſion; He tells us in the cloſe, that it is not for want of Matter, his Hiſtory ends ſo ſoon. So far from this, that it is not to be conceived, much leſs to be told, how many of our Lord's Actions are ſtill left unrehearſed. This is the Subſtance of the Twenty-fifth Verſe, *And there are alſo many other things which Jeſus did, the which, if they ſhould be written, every one, I ſuppoſe, that even the World itſelf would not contain the Books that ſhould be written.*

An expreſſion, which ſhews that even the Holy Spirit itſelf does not diſdain thoſe Figures, which They, to whom he condeſcends to ſpeak, find themſelves obliged to uſe, for a more lively expreſſion of their Thoughts, upon lofty Subjects, and extraordinary Occaſions. And this Example proves thoſe ſqueamiſh People to be as bad Caſuiſts as they are Orators; who charge with Falſhood all thoſe innocent Modes of Speech, which only illuſtrate, and adorn, without any ſtudied Intention or natural Tendency, to deceive.

The Subſtance then of this Concluſion is, That there is as much delivered down to us, as need be; though not ſo much as might be. And this acquits the Author of Partiality, in a Caſe where there was no poſſibility of exceeding. It was his Deſign to ſatisfy, but not to oppreſs, us with Evidence. Had not the Former been done, St. *John* could not have ſaid, *Theſe things are written, that ye might believe.* And when enough was written for that Purpoſe, why ſhould we deſire, why ſhould we fondly obtrude that which is not written for more? It can be no juſt Reflection upon Scripture, or its Perfection, that all our Lord's Miracles are not related, all his Diſcourſes not repeated there; ſince that is truly perfect, which is ſufficiently fitted for its End. And they, who tax the Goſpel of ſuch Inſufficiency,

will do well to acquaint us, what Additions to it will ſuffice. What can thoſe Miracles be, which would convince, if theſe, which we know already, are too weak? What thoſe Diſcourſes, which would prevail, if ſuch as we read here, have not the Power to perſuade? Men may bear others in hand, and, perhaps, delude themſelves, with a Pretence, that, if ſome Diſcoveries were a little clearer, ſome things expreſs'd more fully and diſtinctly, ſome Grounds of Objection obviated; they would believe as aſſuredly, and live as ſtrictly, as they, who preſs the Neceſſity of both moſt, could wiſh. But all theſe are vain Imaginations, and they know not what they aſk. Were all theſe things juſt as they would have them, yet even then, they would be, where they are. The ſame Pride, or favourite Luſt, or worldly Intereſt, would ſtill produce the ſame Effects. And no Words can ever be ſo plain, but theſe might draw to an ambiguous Senſe; no Points ſo clear, where Prejudice cannot ſtart freſh Doubts. In a Word, what *Abraham* left upon the Rich Man, is, with its neceſſary Variation, true of all Mankind, who live under the Miniſtry of the Goſpel: *If they believe not* the Revelations they have already, *neither would they believe*, neither would they be contented with, any other they could have. He that is an Infidel, would be an Infidel ſtill; And he that is unjuſt and filthy, would be unjuſt and filthy ſtill. *Cleanſe* therefore *your hands, ye wicked*, and *purify your hearts, ye double-minded*; *Draw nigh unto God, and he will draw nigh to you*; For, if any Man be ſeriouſly diſpoſed to do his Will, and ſtand not in his own Light, that Man ſhall not fail to *know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God*, or whether *Jeſus Chriſt*, and his Apoſtles, have ſpoken of themſelves.

But as for Thoſe, who are already perſuaded of the Truth, as it is in *Jeſus*; let Them thankfully receive that Meaſure of Light, which God hath afforded. Let them bleſs him, for the abundant Evidence he hath given; for aſſuring their Hearts in the Faith of his Son; eſteeming it, as it really is, the Glory of our Religion,

ligion, that all the Excellencies of its Divine Author are too many, too great, to bear a particular Illuſtration. Let them ſtudy with Diligence the moſt faithful Records of his moſt holy Life; and ſearch for the Treaſures of Wiſdom in his Heavenly Diſcourſes. Let them improve, by what they do or may know here, in Holineſs of Converſation; and wait with Patience and humble Hope, for the raviſhing Diſcovery of that hereafter, which as yet is unattainable. So ſhall they pay true Reverence to the Memory of thoſe Saints, by whoſe Labours they have been inſtructed, when they at once dwell upon their Books, and live by their Examples: So, be ſure to obtain the ſeaſonable Requeſts, in which, with a Charity large as His, whom we commemorate this Day, they beſeech God *of his Mercy ſo to enlighten his Church with the Doctrine of this bleſſed Apoſtle and Evangeliſt St.* John, that every Member of it *may ſo walk in the Light of his Truth, as at length to attain the Light of everlaſting Life, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.* Amen. *Collect.*

The Innocents Day.

The COLLECT.

O Almighty God, who out of the mouths of babes and ſucklings haſt * ordained ſtrength, and makeſt infants to glorify thee † by their Deaths: Mortify and kill all Vices in us, that by the ‡ Innocency of our Lives, and Conſtancy of our faith, even unto death, we may glorify thy holy Name, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. *Amen.*

* Pſal. viii. 2.
† Matth. ii. 16.
‡ Rev. xiv. 4, 5.

For the EPISTLE.

Rev. xiv. 1.

1. *I Looked, and lo, a Lamb ſtood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thouſand, having his Father's name written in their Foreheads.*

PARAPHRASE.

1. Another Repreſentation I had of Chriſt (the Lamb of God) ſtanding in his

his Church, and all his faithful Servants, who ſtuck to the Profeſſion and Practice of the Truth, with him.

2. At the ſame time I heard a mixed Noiſe, exceeding loud, and yet melodious too; denoting the Multitude of theſe faithful Chriſtians, the Praiſes, and Acclamations, and the Joy, that are among them in Heaven.

2. *And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder, and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps.*

3. Such is the glorious State of the Church triumphant where God ſits in Majeſty, ſurrounded with the Spirts of Apoſtles, and other Holy Rulers of his Church; where the Martyrs and Saints ſing their Thanks to God for his Grace and good Providence in their Sufferings for Chriſt. Thanks, which none are capable of bearing a part in, but the ſtedfaſt pure Believers.

3. *And they ſung as it were a new ſong before the Throne, and before the four beaſts and the Elders, and no man could learn that ſong, but the hundred and forty and four thouſand, which were redeemed from the earth.*

4. And theſe are ſuch as preſerved themſelves from the Pollutions of Idolatry and Uncleanneſs: Kept cloſe to Chriſt, and declined no Danger he led them to: were reſcued from the Corruptions of the Age they lived in, ſanctified and preſented as an Offering, the Choice, the Early Product of the Field, (like the Firſt Fruits heretofore) to God and Chriſt.

4. *Theſe are they which were not defiled with women, for they are Virgins: Theſe are they which follow the Lamb whitherſoever he goeth: Theſe were redeemed from among men, being the firſt fruits unto God, and unto the Lamb.*

5. A Sacrifice, acceptable to God for their Conſtancy and Sincerity, like thoſe under the Law, in which no Blemiſh was found.

5. *And in their mouth was found no guile; for they are without fault before the Throne of God.*

COMMENT.

ST. *John*, in the Chapter next before, deſcribes a Viſion, repreſenting a very ſevere Perſecution of the Chriſtian Church; ſuch as endeavour'd, by all manner of Hardſhips, to draw Men over to Idolatry, and deprive thoſe of Life and

Chap. xii. 15, 16, 17.

and Civil Liberties, who refuſed to ſubmit to the wicked Decrees, impoſed on them to this Purpoſe. And here he proceeds to ſet before us the Conſtancy and happy Condition of thoſe, who continued ſtedfaſt in their Principles, notwithſtanding all ſuch Diſcouragements to the contrary. Without entering therefore into any particular Enquiry, what diſtinct Events this Portion of Scripture was more eſpecially calculated for; it ſhall be my Care rather to improve it, by conſidering, in general, the Caſe of thoſe, who live and die in the undaunted Confeſſion of the Truth. And that ſhall be done under Two Heads. The *One* conſiſting of the Virtues and Qualifications, that theſe Saints and Martyrs are ſaid to be conſpicuous for: The other, of the Circumſtances of that bliſsful State, into which they are received, as a Reward for thoſe Virtues.

I. I begin with the Virtues and Qualifications, for which theſe Saints and Martyrs are ſaid to be conſpicuous: according to that View of them, preſented to us in the *Fourth* and *Fifth* Verſes.

1. The Firſt of theſe is, That *they were not defiled with Women, for they are Virgins.* From whence, what Advantage ſoever the Patrons and Advocates of a Single Life, voluntary, and vowed upon a Religious Account, may fancy to themſelves; 'tis manifeſt, they over-ſtrain the Point, when caſting Reflections upon that State of Life, which the Scriptures have expreſly pronounced *Honourable*; and, when they ſuppoſe all thoſe Approaches to pollute any Sort or Order of Men, which the Apoſtle hath abundantly vindicated, by ſtiling them the *Bed undefiled.* From hence alone it would follow, evidently enough, that by the Perſons *not defiled with Women,* muſt be meant here (if thoſe Words were to be literally underſtood) Men, who never allowed themſelves in any unlawful Liberties of this Kind: Such as by mortifying their carnal Inclinations and Appetites, did as St. *Paul* expreſſes himſelf upon a like Occaſion, *poſſeſs their Veſſel in Sanctification and Honour.* And this

Heb. xiii. 4.

is

is very capable of being done; Not only by never taſting ſuch Pleaſures at all; But alſo, by marrying, and ſuch a Behaviour in that State, as thus alſo *to keep themſelves pure and undefiled Members of Chriſt's Body.*

This I ſay, muſt, in all Reaſon, be the Signification of the Place, if taken literally. But very judicious Interpreters have rather inclined to a Figurative Importance of the Words. Nothing is more uſual in the Old Teſtament, than to reproach the revolt of God's People to Idolatry, in the Terms of *committing Adultery* and *Fornication againſt him, going a whoring after falſe Gods*, and the like. Nor is this Stile peculiar to the Old, but St. *Paul*, in the New Teſtament, expreſſing his Fear and great Concern, leſt the *Corinthians* ſhould have been ſeduced by falſe Teachers; does it by an Alluſion, exactly the ſame. *I am jealous over you with a godly jealouſy, for I have eſpouſed you to one Huſband, that I may preſent you as a chaſte Virgin to Chriſt. But I fear, leſt by any means, as the Serpent beguiled Eve through his Subtlety, ſo your Minds ſhould be corrupted from the Simplicity that is in Chriſt.* Accordingly we find the Church called the *Spouſe*, and our Lord the *Bridegroom*, and the Spiritual Unity between theſe Two, repreſented by Marriage. All which Metaphors do plainly proceed, upon the unalienable Right he hath, to our Worſhip and our Affection; and tend to prove that the eſtranging the One or the Other from him, is an Act of the higheſt and moſt irreparable Injuſtice, a Violation of the moſt ſolemn, moſt ſacred, Tie in the World.

Exod. xxxiv. 15. Judg. ii. 17, viii. 33. Pſal. civ. 39. Jerem. iii. 9. Ezek. xvi. 29, *to* 37.

2 Cor. xi. 2, 3.

Rev. xix. 7. Matth. ix. 15. John iii. 29. Epheſ. v. 31.

In Agreement with this Manner of ſpeaking, ſo reaſonable in itſelf, ſo familiar to both Teſtaments, we may very well underſtand thoſe Perſons to be intended here, who had withſtood all Allurements and Solicitations to Apoſtacy, and, with the ſtricteſt Fidelity, adhered to their rightful Lord. The rather, becauſe the Perſecution now referred to, came from the Hand of a Heathen

Heathen Emperor. And the Inſtance, in which their Compliance was required, was that of doing Honour to Idols, by Sacrifice, or Incenſe, or ſome other external Mark of Adoration. The rather ſtill, becauſe, not only their Heathen Perſecutors, but their falſe complying Brethren, the Hereticks of thoſe Times, indulged themſelves in the vileſt Senſuality. And therefore, in Oppoſition to thoſe abominable Beſtialities, it might be yet more proper, to expreſs the immoveable Perſeverance of theſe Faithful, by Terms of the ſtricteſt Chaſtity, and a Freedom from all Carnal Pollutions. And thus, I take it, we have a rational Conſtruction of thoſe Words, applied to Uncleanneſs and Fornication, in a Figurative and Spiritual Senſe, *Theſe are they which were not defiled with Women, for they are Virgins.*

This Uſe however we not only may, but moſt certainly ought to make, of the Holy Spirit's chuſing to ſpeak after this manner; That it is to very little Purpoſe, for Men to pretend Conſcience, and Zeal, and Suffering for Religion, unleſs to the Soundneſs of their Principles, they be careful to add Purity of Converſation. When therefore People of vicious Lives expoſe themſelves to Hardſhips, for the ſake of Opinions never ſo well eſtabliſhed, and in Points never ſo eſſential; Do they not miniſter juſt Cauſe of Suſpicion, that this is rather the Effect of Prejudice, or Education, of Humour, or Intereſt, than of Conſcience and Religion? 'Tis ſure, no Man ought to give up what his Conſcience tells him he ought to abide by, in point of Doctrine. But is it not as ſure, that he ought not to indulge any thing forbidden, in point of Practice? Nay, is not this latter Obligation ſo much ſtronger, as the Matters of Practice are clearer, and leſs liable to Diſpute or Miſtake, than moſt Points of Doctrine? 'Tis certainly *good to be zealouſly affected in a good thing*, but a Zeal that is ſincere, will be ſo *always*, and in every good thing. And, if this be not the Caſe, a Man is *zealouſly affected, but not well.* In ſhort, Conſcience is an uniform Rule, extending to every part of our Duty; and Religion,

Gal. iv. 18.

ligion commands doing, as well as ſuffering. So that there is but one way of bringing true Honour to this Cauſe: and therefore, if we would die Martyrs, we muſt live Saints.

2. The Second Character of theſe Faithful is, That *they follow the Lamb whitherſoever he goeth.* Which, though we might extend to an Imitation of Chriſt, in all thoſe Graces and Virtues, of which he hath ſet us a Pattern; Yet, ſince the *following him* is a Phraſe, ſo often joined with *taking up the Croſs:* And, in regard the Perſons here ſpoken of, are ſuch as did in this Senſe follow him: It ſeems moſt reaſonable to underſtand the Words, of declining no Trials, that the Providence of God thought fit to call them to. And thus they are diſtinguiſhed from thoſe forward Men, who, like the Seed in Stony Ground, put forth apace, and promiſe mighty Matters by the haſty Efforts of their eager Zeal; but, when *the Heat of Tribulation ariſeth, wither away.* Theſe, like the good Ground, on the other hand, have Root and Depth of Earth. They have conſidered and prepared their Minds; They ſuffer upon a Principle; and this enables them to bring forth Fruit with Patience. And the Reaſon, why ſuch alone is good Ground, is, becauſe, as God hath a Right to the whole of us, ſo he declares he will not endure any Rival, any Reſerve. And therefore, how difficult ſoever it may ſeem, or, upon making the Experiment, may prove; Yet it is certainly a juſt and equitable Condition, which our Saviour hath propounded, that *whoſoever does not* (in Compariſon of him) *hate his Father and Mother, and Wife, and Children, and Brethren, and Siſters, yea and his own Life alſo, he cannot be his Diſciple: And whoſoever doth not bear his Croſs, and come after him, cannot be his Diſciple.* The Reaſon is, becauſe, from the Inſtant of devoting ourſelves to His Service, we ceaſe to be at our own diſpoſal any longer. Not that this Act of ours conveys a new Right; but it acknowledges, and makes that our Choice, which, by Creation and Redemption,

Matt. xiii. 21.

Luke xiv. 26, 27.

was doubly veſted in him before. And to ſay after this, So far we will go in our Obedience, and no farther; To quit our Poſt, when even in the hotteſt of the Battle; To be anxious for our Poſſeſſions, or our Dependencies, or even our Perſons, when called into the Field; All this St. *Paul* tells his Son *Timothy*, is abſurd, and quite beſide our Character. *Thou therefore* (ſays he) *endure Hardneſs as a good Soldier of Jeſus Chriſt. No Man that warreth entangleth himſelf with the Affairs of this Life, that he may pleaſe Him, who hath choſen him to be a Soldier.* 2 Tim. ii. 3, 4.

But, beſides the great deal that might be urged, from the Propriety and abſolute Dominion of God; The much more, from the Wiſdom of the Thing, with reſpect to the Recompence we ſhall be ſure to receive; This methinks ſhould admit of no Debate, whether we ought not *to follow*, where *the Lamb* leads. Which is in Effect to doubt, Whether any Inſtance of our Love ought to be thought too much, for Him, who hath given ſuch coſtly Proofs of his Love to Us: Whether we ſhall be content to ſuffer upon command, for our own infinite Advantage, and to prevent much worſe Sufferings, in Caſe of Diſobedience: When He, who left us the Example, did it voluntarily, for the unſpeakable Benefit of Us, not to acquire any Addition of Happineſs, not to prevent any Inconvenience, to Himſelf. In ſhort, whether We ſhall be content to endure, unſpeakably leſs than He; to do what, if we depend upon Him, He will render us able to do; in order to being afterwards as Happy with Him, as it is poſſible for Men to be; who yet, without Him, can never be, never could have been, happy at all.

I have offered but a very little part of what this Conſideration might ſuggeſt. But This, I hope, is enough to make all, who judge impartially, ſenſible, that they who follow the Lamb, to Priſon, to Death, whitherſoever he goeth, act, as becomes Men of Reaſon and Religion. Let me add only upon this Particular, that, when Men are thus convinced, and called upon, and obey that Call heartily; it is neceſſary they remember, that

a Lamb

a Lamb is the Leader they profeſs to follow. One called ſo; Not only becauſe a moſt precious Sacrifice, a true Paſſover; But becauſe, as a Lamb before his Shearers is dumb, ſo he was led to the Slaughter, and opened not his Mouth. Courage indeed in ſuffering for a good Cauſe is well; But if Courage be not temper'd with Meekneſs; if our Reſentments burn in our Breaſts, and boil over in undutiful Behaviour, Projects of Miſchief and Revenge, opprobrious Language, or any ſort of indecent Bitterneſs, the Gracefulneſs at leaſt of all ſuch Suffering is loſt; and neither We, nor our Cauſe, are like to get by it. Therefore among other Methods propoſed by St. *Peter*, for eſtabliſhing the Credit of Chriſtianity among its Adverſaries, he ſeems to be principally concerned for the Manner of their Suffering. He propounds Chriſt as a Pattern in this reſpect eſpecially, *of doing well, and even when they ſuffered for that, taking it patiently*; *For hereunto*, ſays he, *were ye called, for Chriſt alſo ſuffered for us, leaving us an Example, that ye ſhould follow his ſteps, who did no Sin, neither was Guile found in his Mouth: Who when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he ſuffered, he threatened not, but committed himſelf to him that judgeth righteouſly*, &c.

1 Pet. ii. 20, 21, 22, 23.

By comparing which Exhortation with St. *John*'s Account of the Martyrs in this Chapter, it is eaſy to diſcern, that this Dove-like Simplicity and Innocence, this gentle and reſigned Submiſſion to the Divine Will, this modeſt, even when ſtouteſt, Reſiſtance unto Blood, is neceſſary, to render them the Perſons, deſcribed at the Fifth Verſe, in whoſe *Mouth was found no Guile, for they are without fault before the Throne of God.* The Latter of theſe Expreſſions, I make no doubt, alludes to that Law among the *Jews*, which ordered a ſtrict Search into all the Creatures brought for Sacrifice; and forbad the Offering, in which there was any Defect, or Superfluity, or notable Blemiſh. Hence 'tis, we find our Bleſſed Lord termed the *Lamb without Spot*; And here the Saints are ſaid to be without Fault, becauſe no *Guile was found*

in

in their Mouth, that is, by Reaſon of their undeſigning Sincerity, and the uncorrupted Probity of their Minds. Now, as this Character imports their Truth and Honeſty in general, ſo may it poſſibly have peculiar Reference to a fraudulent Method, too often, and too ſcandalouſly, uſed in times of Perſecution. For, in order to avoid Torture and publick Shame, Some did, by private Notes to the Magiſtrate, falſly ſignify, that they had ſacrificed to Idols: And Others, who durſt not go thus far, yet brought Certificates underhand of their having done ſo. And ſo, for the ſaving a Loſs or perſonal Danger, were content to bear the Infamy, and give the Scandal, of a Crime they never committed. Such Tickets a learned Man hath thought no improbable Senſe of *having the Mark or Name of the Beaſt*; And the not ſubmitting to any mean Subterfuges, but daring to appear what Men are, and ought to be, is certainly one Inſtance of a Heart without Guile, neceſſary in the Day of Trial.

Cypr. ad Antonianum & de Lapſ. Albaſp. Obſer. 21. I. 1.

3. There remains yet One Character of theſe Martyrs to be conſidered, in thoſe Words, *Theſe were redeemed from among Men, being the Firſt Fruits unto God, and to the Lamb.* By being *redeemed from among Men*, we are to underſtand, that they were delivered from the common Corruptions of the World; ſupported under Temptations, by which others were ſubdued; and kept by the Grace and Power of God unto Salvation. All which are Privileges, owing to the Merits and Efficacy of Chriſt's Blood, delivering from the Bondage of Sin, and ranſoming thoſe, who had otherwiſe continued Captives and Slaves to the Tyrannical Enemy of Souls, into *the glorious Liberty of the Sons of God.* So that the Proofs they gave of their fervent Love, and unſhaken Obedience, are not an Act entirely their own, but muſt be aſcribed to an unſeen and ſupernatural Aſſiſtance; To the Spirit of God, ſtrengthening their Weakneſs, confirming their Reſolution, and producing

that Perſeverance, which Fleſh and Blood, alone and left to itſelf, is not now in a Condition of attaining.

And theſe again are called the *Firſt Fruits* to God, in Alluſion to the Cuſtom of offering the Firſt and the Beſt of the Crop, as an Acknowledgment due to the Giver of all good Gifts; and an Expedient, inſtituted to ſanctify the reſt of the Field. In the former Senſe, as the *Firſt*, we are to look upon theſe Perſons as our Leaders, placed in the forefront of the Battle, ſuch as have borne the hotteſt of the Engagement, and were expoſed to the Fury of the Enemy; the Martyrs, by this Poſt of Honour, have not only gained Promotion to themſelves; but have, by their Examples, done Service to all that come after them. For, how ought we to be quickened and provoked by the Conſtancy of their Sufferings? And how ſcandalous is our Cowardice, if we ſhall faint and give ground, after They have ſo bravely broken the Force of the Enemy that comes againſt us?

Levit. xxiii.

As the Firſt Fruits again import the *Beſt* of the Field, ſo are we to regard them, as Perſons particularly favoured by God and the Lamb. For, though the Death of all his Saints be precious, even of thoſe who live and die in Peace; Yet we cannot but ſee good Reaſon, why ſome Preference ſhould be given to that Death, which is voluntary and choſen, violent, and attended with infinite Torture and Pain; above that, which is natural and neceſſary, and hath no Agonies, but ſuch as the parting of Soul and Body renders common to all Mankind. There is a manifeſt Difference between dying *in* the Faith, and dying *for* it: between not falling from our Integrity at our Laſt Hour, and being content to anticipate that Hour by ſacrificing a Life, at our Choice to preſerve, in defence, and for the ſake, of Truth and a good Conſcience. All the *Righteous*, we are aſſured, *ſhall ſhine in the Kingdom of their Father*, but not all with equal Luſtre. For that Juſtice, which *rewards Men according to their Works*, is not more concerned to crown every one *that ſtrives lawfully*, than it is, to ſee,

Matt. xiii. 43.

ſee, that thoſe, who undergo ſharper Conflicts, and have borne a heavier Croſs, be as much diſtinguiſhed in the Meaſures of their Recompence, and adorned with a proportionably more maſſive and brighter Crown.

II. And this leads me to ſay ſomewhat of my Other General Head; The Circumſtances of that bliſsful State in which theſe Martyrs are deſcribed here, as a Reward for their Virtues and paſt Sufferings.

The firſt of theſe is being with *the Lamb upon Mount Sion*, that is, the *Heavenly Jeruſalem*; Of which That on Earth, where the Temple of God ſtood, and the Marks of his eſpecial Preſence were exhibited, is, in ſundry Places of this and other Books in the New Teſtament, ſaid to have been a Figure. And yet, though but a Figure, what glorious things do we find ſpoken of it in Scripture? What devout Raptures of Joy in the holy Pſalmiſt, when at Liberty to approach it? What tender Complaints, what moving Lamentations, when debarr'd of this moſt valuable Privilege? But, if the Shadow could deſerve ſuch Honour, how ought we to be affected with the Subſtance? If the ſenſible and Symbolical Repreſentations only were ſo magnificent, what muſt the Luſtre of that Preſence be, when this Veil of Fleſh and Senſe ſhall be done away, and we admitted to ſee God as he is? To be with Him whom our Souls love, with Him who loved our Souls ſo dearly, as to be born, to be afflicted, to bleed, to die for them; To be with Him for ever, to enjoy him in a League of inviolable, everlaſting Friendſhip, in the Manſions he is gone before to prepare for us? To partake in his Glories, as we have taken part in his Sufferings; and to feel our own Glories advanced then, in Proportion as our Sufferings are multiplied here? No Dangers, no Fatigues, are eſteemed inſupportable by the Men of this World, for the raiſing a Fortune, for gaining the Renown or Valour, and faithful Service to a Prince, who is thought to pay them well, with a gracious Look ſometimes,

Ver. 1.
Gal. iv. 26.
Heb. xii. 22.
Rev. iii. 12.
xxi. 2, 10.

with a Title of Honour, and a ſmall Revenue to their Family. But What, alas! are theſe, in compariſon of the conſtant Favour and Preſence, the intimate and unalterable Affection, of the King of Kings, the being diſtinguiſh'd in the Court of Heaven, let into a ſhare of all our Maſter's Glory, nay, let into a ſhare even of his Royalties themſelves? This is what the higheſt Favourite, the worthieſt Patriot, muſt not have the Vanity to hope for, from the moſt gracious Monarch upon Earth. And yet this is the Condeſcenſion of our heavenly Lord, this the Honour and Partnerſhip, to which Saints and Martyrs have a Title.

Rev. i. 6. v. 10. For, Theſe he is ſaid to make *Kings* and *Prieſts*, and to all ſuch is promiſed for their

2 Tim. ii. 12. Encouragement, that *if they die with him, they ſhall alſo live with him; if they ſuffe with him, they ſhall alſo reign with him.* Nor is the Pleaſure flowing from theſe Promotions, like that from theſe here below, the leſs for being thus communicated. Quite otherwiſe; I take a

2. *Second* Circumſtance of the Bliſs deſcribed in this Chapter, to reſult from the numbers, to whom it is imparted. Great part of the Satisfaction, taken in the Bleſſings of this World, depends upon Compariſon. Few would eſteem themſelves happy in the Enjoyment, did not this make a difference between their own, and the Caſe of others that want them. Nor is this altogether, though too much, from Narrowneſs of Spirit; but, in great Meaſure, from the Streightneſs and Inſufficiency of the things themſelves. But now, the Bleſſings of our Future State being Boundleſs, and ſuch as can never be exhauſted; As theſe Qualities leave no room for Envy and Emulation, ſo neither will glorified Souls retain any Diſpoſition to them. Every other's Happineſs will then be an Addition to each Man's Perſonal Happineſs. But more eſpecially will they all be affected with the Honour of our God and Saviour, and the Conqueſts and Succeſſes his Blood hath obtained; Which, the more the Redeemed and Glorified are, the greater and more wonderful

derful they are. And therefore it had taken from this Bliſs, and repreſented it much leſs, to have ſaid, that One, or a Few, than that a *Hundred and forty-four thouſand* of theſe Saints, were all together with *the Lamb on Mount Sion.* And the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* hath therefore added, that we ſhall then *come to an innumerable Company of Angels, To the general Aſſembly and Church of the firſt born, which are written in Heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the Spirits of juſt Men made perfect, and to Jeſus the Mediator of the new Covenant.* Heb. xii. 22, 23, 24.

Imagine with yourſelves Two Friends, dear as their own Souls to each other; Theſe, both engaged in Enterpriſes of the utmoſt Difficulty, in diſtant Parts of the World; Each exerciſed with Dangers and Hardſhips, for the Service of his Country; And, with a vaſt Expence of Blood and Toil, ſucceeding ſo well, that no Marks of Honour are thought too much for them. Imagine theſe Two Friends, after long Abſence, thus laden with Conqueſt, and adorned with Laurels, meeting and finding each other, juſt as they could wiſh; What joyful Welcomes, what mutual Rejoicings, what reciprocal Fruition of their paſt Labours, and preſent Triumphs, muſt ſuch an Interview create? And when you have carried this Image as high as you can go, and multiplied it to Ten Thouſand times as much, by ſuppoſing Ten Thouſand ſuch Caſes; Know that ſuch, and much more than this, are the mutual Gratulations of the Bleſſed in Heaven. As much more, as their Sufferings have been ſharper; As much more, as the Cauſe in which they ſuffered is nobler; As much more, as the Enemies they have vanquiſhed are ſtronger; as much more as the Reward for their Service is more bountiful, more laſting, more unenvied; In a Word, As much more, as theſe myſtical Members of Chriſt's Body are united with a more entire and diſtintereſted Affection, and conſequently more tranſported with the gallant Actions, and Succeſſes, and Glories of each other, than it is poſſible for the ſincereſt and moſt generous Friends on Earth to

be. And this Love, this Unanimity it is, that qualifies them to join in that, which I would obſerve from the *Third* Verſe, as another Circumſtance of their Felicity:

3. The ſinging together Concerts of Praiſe to God and the Lamb. For, that ſuch is the Subject of their Song, we may learn from ſeveral like Paſſages of this Book. And this muſt needs be an eternal Subject. For if even We, who ſee things very darkly, might yet, with very little Application, find Matter more than enough, to employ the Whole of our Lives in Holy Thanks and Wonder: How plentifully muſt they be furniſhed, who are placed in a nearer and more diſtinct View, of the eſſential Excellencies, and marvellous Works of God? How delightful muſt Their Contemplation be of the Majeſty and Power, the Wiſdom and the Goodneſs, the Holineſs and the Juſtice of God? How pleaſing the Reflections of theſe, which are caſt upon their Minds; From the Glaſs of the Creation, the niceſt and moſt beauteous parts whereof are at preſent hid from our Sight; From the Diſpoſitions of Providence, and thoſe ſecret Overrulings of Events, which make *all things work together for good to them that love God*; From the Myſteries of our Redemption, and *that love of Chriſt which paſſeth Knowledge*; and, not to mention more, From their own paſt Labours and Sufferings, and that Condeſcenſion, which counted them worthy to *endure Reproach for the ſake of Chriſt*; permitted their Blood to be ſhed in ſo Glorious a Cauſe; and made them ſo ample a Compenſation, for every Drop they ſpilt, for every Tear they ſhed, for every Torture they felt, for every dying Agony they ſo magnanimouſly ſuſtained. Who can ſee, and feel, and meditate on, theſe Things in Silence; Who can ſpeak of them in any Language, but that of Praiſe? And who. that hath begun to praiſe, can ever deſiſt again? But withal, ſince this Song of Praiſe, it is expreſly ſaid, could not be learnt by any but ſuch Saints; Who would think any Coſt too much to purchaſe a part in

Chap. v. 9, 10, 12, 13. vii. 10, &c. xix. 1, 7.

in ſuch Felicity? Who *count even his Life dear to him, ſo that he might finiſh his Courſe with ſuch Joy* as this? And therefore it is that theſe Joys are revealed, that they may excite in us a becoming Zeal, and fervent Deſire; The ſame, that Men of like Paſſions, and like good Senſe at leaſt, with ourſelves, have been fired with, and found their Account in: The ſame, that will add to our Reproach and Condemnation, if we reſolve to periſh ſlothfully and inglorioufly, and will neither be attracted to Virtue by ſuch Proſpects, nor ſhamed into Courage by ſuch Examples. Acts xx. 24.

Theſe are ſome of the many Conſiderations, Offering themſelves, from the Account now before us, concerning the Martyrs in general. Which the Church hath propounded to our Meditations this Day, as containing ſome things, not improperly applicable to thoſe Infants in particular, whoſe barbarous Murther by *Herod* was made Inſtrumental to the Glory of Him for whom they died. For they, in the moſt literal Senſe, *were not defiled* with ſenſual Pleaſures, who left the World in *Virgin* Innocence. They were moſt truly *redeemed from among Men*, whoſe early Tranſlation to a State of Bliſs and Security, prevented the Hazards and Temptations of a corrupt Age. They were, ſtrictly ſpeaking, *the Firſt Fruits unto God and the Lamb*, who began to ſhed their Blood, in the Cauſe of a new-born Saviour, and were the firſt Fruits of the Martyrs themſelves. By this earlieſt Experiment of Cruelty againſt his bleſſed Son, it pleaſed God to demonſtrate, how vain all future attempts of his Enemies ſhould be, whoſe implacable and bloody Malice laboured to deſtroy this hated King of the *Jews*, either in his Perſon or his Members: And, that ſuch wicked Deſigns ſhould have no other Iſſue, than thoſe of this Day, Diſappointment and Vengeance to the inhuman Contrivers, Happineſs and Reward to the Innocent Sufferers, and Increaſe of Honour to the Perſon, in whoſe cauſe they ſuffered. Thus *Herod* ſhortly after lived and died, a remarkable monument of the Divine Juſtice, and periſhed by a Complication of Plagues, as

amazing as the unparallel'd Crimes, that drew them down upon him. Thus theſe tender Plants, cut off in the bud, ſprung up again and flouriſhed; And bore ſuch fruits, as their Circumſtances were capable of; The confeſſion of their Blood, tho' not of their Tongues: By which they and their Memory are bleſſed. And Thus the bleſſed Jeſus, after ſo journing in a ſtrange country, returned to enlighten his own, with that Doctrine, which, from the very firſt ſetting out of its Author into the World, was manured with Blood, grew under Perſecutions, and by the Fate attending it, proved, that to die in its Defence, was not to loſe a Life, but to ſave it. This is in Truth the quickeſt and ſureſt Paſſage, from Death unto Life. From a Life, in the midſt of which we are in Death; To a Life, which is ſo indeed; Life immortal and full of Glory. To which God of his infinite Mercy bring us, for the ſake of his Dear Son, and our only Redeemer, Chriſt Jeſus. *Amen.*

The GOSPEL.

PARAPHRASE.

St. Matth. ii. 13.

13. Almighty God, foreſeeing the wicked Deſign of *Herod* againſt Chriſt, and the cruel Effects of his Diſappointment of Intelligence from the Wiſemen, gave *Joſeph* timely Warning of it, by the Meſſage of an Angel, and directed him what Courſe to take, for preſerving the Child and his Mother.

13. *THE Angel of the Lord appeared to Joſeph in a Dream, ſaying, Ariſe and take the young Child and his Mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee Word: for Herod will ſeek the young child to deſtroy him.*

14. This Meſſage *Joſeph* readily complied with, and taking the Advantage of the night to conceal his Motions, went away with *Jeſus* and the Virgin.

14. *And he aroſe, and took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt.*

15. *And*

15. *And was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was ſpoken of the Lord by the Prophet, ſaying, Out of Egypt have I called my Son.*

15. And dwelt in *Egypt*, till *Herod* died, and he received freſh Orders, as the Angel had promiſed he ſhould, for returning back again. By this Method the Divine Providence accompliſhed a Prophecy of *Hoſea*, (which had not only a Retroſpect upon what had paſſed upon *Iſrael*, but) looked forward alſo upon Him, of whom *Iſrael*, when ſpoken of as the Servant or Child of God, is more than once ſet as a Type, even the Meſſiah.

16. *Then Herod, when he ſaw that he was mocked of the wiſemen, was exceeding wroth, and ſent forth, and ſlew all the Children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the Coaſts thereof, from two Years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wiſemen.*

16. Mean while *Herod*, impatient of the Affront and Diſappointment, ſuſtained by the Wiſemen not informing him where this Child was to be found, reſolved to take a Courſe for deſtroying him, which he thought could not miſs. And that was, to murder all the Children in and about the Place, where it was agreed Chriſt muſt have been born; and of or about that Age, which (by Computation of the Time when this Star denoted that Birth) Chriſt muſt have been of.

17. *Then was fulfilled that which was ſpoken by Jeremy the Prophet, ſaying,*

18. *In Rama there was a Voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, becauſe they are not.*

17, 18. The general Grief upon which Occaſion was a moſt eminent Completion of that Prophecy in *Jeremiah*, which repreſents *Rachael*, the Mother of *Joſeph* and *Benjamin*, (and conſequently a proper Mourner for the Captivity of the Ten Tribes ſignified by *Ephraim*, and for this Calamity too, ſince *Benjamin* and *Judah*'s Poſterity, the Two other Tribes, were promiſcuouſly concerned, and dwelt by one another) inconſolably bewailing the Loſs and Death of her Children. And, for ſuch Sorrow of afflicted Mothers, there could never be a more melancholy Cauſe, than the Barbarity of *Herod* gave, by this general and bloody Slaughter.

COMMENT.

COMMENT.

THE Hiſtorical Account of this Paſſage is ſo plain, that almoſt the Only, as well as the moſt profitable, thing I have to do, will be to improve it, by ſome Moral Reflections. To which purpoſe I ſhall obſerve, What were the wicked Incentives to this barbarous Injuſtice, How theſe came to prevail, The Circumſtances of Them who ſuffered, And the Unſucceſsfulneſs of this bloody Act, to the End, hoped and intended to have been accompliſhed by it.

Firſt then, We have in *Herod* a very lively Inſtance of Envy and Ambition. The ground of his uneaſineſs was the news of one born *King of the Jews*, which ſeemed to threaten Danger to his own, and his Family's Pretenſions to the Government. And it may be worth our while to take notice, by what vile and indirect Methods he laboured to prevent the ſuppoſed ill Conſequences of this memorable Event.

Herod, no doubt, was full of that miſtaken notion of the Meſſiah's Coming (then daily expected) that it ſhould be in outward Pomp and Splendor, and the Excellency of a Kingdom, conſiſting in Victories and Triumphs, and worldly Dominion. And therefore, to cut this ſhort at once, he deſcends to the baſeſt Hypocriſy, and profeſſes a Deſire of doing homage to this glorious young Prince. But, finding that Project of diſſembled Reſpect defeated, he enters upon Another, of Sacrificing to his Jealouſy a great Number of young Children. And, if Some, who have treated of this Matter, ſay true, he had the unnatural Barbarity to take off a Son of his own among the reſt.

Now, what a warning ſhould ſuch an Example as this be, to every Man that ſees or hears of it, to keep a ſtrait Hand over thoſe Deſires of Honour and Greatneſs, which are ſo natural to Mankind; ſo very pleaſing, when gratified; but withal, ſo full of Jealouſy and Torment, ſo very apt to break through all Obligations of

Nature

Nature and Duty, when indulged beyond due Meaſure? And indulged beyond due Meaſure they certainly are, when not reſtrained by this Principle, of not allowing ourſelves in any thing unlawful, unſincere, or unbecoming, for the giving them Satisfaction. How wretched a Contradiction are thoſe People to themſelves, who, in their too warm and eager Purſuits after Honour, ſtick at no means, tho' never ſo diſhonourable? This is to proſtitute the very thing they profeſs to court. How heinous an Injury is it to an Inclination, which ſeems to have been interwoven with our Original Conſtitution, on purpoſe for a Spur, to uſeful, noble, and uncommon Undertakings, when, inſtead of being excited by it to Actions laudable and good, Men debaſe it to the moſt miſchievous Deſigns; Compaſs their Ends by Perfidiouſneſs, Injuſtice, Inhumanity; Overturn all Laws, and eraſe the beſt and brighteſt Impreſſions of Reaſon and Religion upon their Minds? It is as lamentable, as it is amazing to conſider, to what exorbitant Villainies Men of unbounded Ambition have, without the leaſt appearance of Remorſe, been abandoned, that they might, either arrive at Greatneſs, or eſtabliſh themſelves in it. What Liberties and Rights, What Lives, What Nations and States, have fallen a Prey to this aſpiring Evil? But ſo it ever was, when Power became the Meaſure and Rule, as well as the End, of great Actions and Deſigns; Nothing hath then been boggled at, nothing omitted, which this hath found itſelf able to compaſs.

And yet, as many Tragical Inſtances as Hiſtory furniſhes of this kind, as juſt a Deteſtation as every conſiderate Reader conceives againſt them; it is but too ſad a Truth, that the ſame Cauſe produces the ſame Effects every Day ſtill. It does ſo, even among thoſe who call themſelves Chriſtians. Profeſſors of a Religion, whoſe fundamental Principles, and peculiar Temper, are Humility and Meekneſs, and Contempt of the World. A Religion, which labours above all things, to perſuade us, that not Crowns and Scepters, not univerſal

verſal Empire, not the whole World, and all the Glories of it, are worth the doing any one Thing, to attain or to ſecure them, which may wound our Conſciences, or injure any Man breathing: And, that the true way to be exalted indeed, is to abaſe and to deny ourſelves, to mortify our Vanity, and *to ſeek that Honour, which cometh from God only.*

Methinks it might be one conſiderable Help toward doing ſo, to reflect very ſeriouſly upon the horror of ſuch Examples, as This now before us. By the deſerved *Odium*, and great Enormity of Wretches, ſo tranſported by the force of this furious Paſſion, we might arm ourſelves in time, and oppoſe, againſt the Violence of ſo ſtrong a Torrent, the Engagements of Juſtice and Charity, Moderation, and Humanity, and a ſteady Virtue. For, tho' all theſe are little enough, when the Eagerneſs of Ambition is puſhing us forward; Yet they will be of great uſe to cool and keep down ſuch heat; if we look before-hand, what Precipices this Paſſion will certainly run us upon, when it grows headſtrong, and gets the Rein in its Teeth. And, however our Judgment may be blinded then; Yet to Them, who ſee the Evil and Danger of this Action here, even *Herod*'s Crown cannot but ſeem a Purchaſe much too dear, at the Expence of ſo much innocent Blood, and the never to be forgotten Guilt, and the Infamy of ſhedding it.

II. *Secondly*, The Inſtance now in hand may be of excellent uſe, to prevent, or correct, the wild exceſſes of Immoderate Anger. The Text tells us that *Herod was exceeding wroth*, and the pretended Ground for this Reſentment was, that he thought himſelf *mocked by the Wiſemen.* But, ſuppoſing Them guilty of Neglect, in not returning with an account where this young King was to be found; yet what Provocation had theſe poor Infants given, that ſuch a Slight ſhould be ſo ſeverely revenged upon Them; How had ſo many tender Mothers deſerved to be made Childleſs? How the Coaſts of *Bethlehem*,

Ver. 16.

to

to be drowned in Blood and Tears, only becauſe God had given that place the honour, of bringing into the World the Joy and Deſire of all Nations, and then had defeated the treachery and malice of a Tyrant, wicked enough to endeavour the diſappointing all Nations, of that Deſire and Joy? But, alas! when we argue thus, it is to be ſuppoſed we addreſs to Men in a Condition to be treated with; and not to thoſe who have loſt all conſideration, and are paſt the Power of *Perſuaſion*. For ſuch in truth are all Men tranſported with Paſſion, and inflamed with Reſentment. Rage then hath got the upper hand of Reaſon; All Regard to Equity is loſt. The Nature of the Crime; the degree of the Puniſhment due for it; Or indeed, Whether any be due; Or if there be, Who are the Perſons on whom it ought to fall; are Deliberations entirely ſet aſide. This wild Beaſt, once let looſe, falls upon every thing that comes in its way, devours without diſtinction, and, in its thirſt for blood, knows no meaſure. And therefore, among the many other forcible Arguments, for governing our Paſſion, This ought by no means to be neglected; That Men in their Fury baniſh all Pity, all Humanity; That neither Juſtice, nor Innocence, nor Sex, nor Age, can ſtand before it. And ſurely nothing ought more to weigh with us for being upon our guard againſt all that is apt to ruffle us than the almoſt irreſiſtible Temptation, which Men, who have loſt their temper, lie under, to act in their heats ſuch unjuſt, ſuch brutiſh things, as all in their right Minds ſcorn and deteſt them for. Such, as themſelves, when looking back upon them in cold Blood, feel they are never able, either to repair the wrong of by any after-compenſation, or to waſh away the guilt and ſhame of, but by the Tears of a moſt afflicting Remorſe.

III. Hence we may take occaſion, in the *Third* place, to obſerve the miſerable Condition of thoſe hardened Wretches, whom Almighty God ſuffers to fall from one degree of Wickedneſs to another, till at laſt they

they become ripe for Deſtruction, and viſible Monuments of the Divine Vengeance. And ſuch was *Herod* here. For the true Underſtanding of whoſe Caſe, and the righteouſneſs of God's Diſpenſation toward him, it may not be amiſs to view the ſeveral Circumſtances mentioned in this Chapter, and to ſhew from thence, wherein his Guilt, and the hardening of his Heart, conſiſted.

Now *Herod* is here repreſented, as a Perſon in great Power, *King of Judea.* The coming of the Wiſemen from another Country, The Reſolution of the Chief Prieſts aſſembled at *Jeruſalem*, concerning the place determined for the *Meſſiah*'s Birth; The general expectation of it about that time; the Wiſemen inferring it already paſſed, and ſignified by the Star, which had conducted them thither; Theſe were all Paſſages very awakening to him. Thoſe Wiſemen diſobeying his Command, of bringing back notice where that Child was to be found, wrought, we ſee, very ſtrongly upon his Mind. And the Conſequence makes it manifeſt, what Deſigns he cheriſhed from the very firſt; and that his diſſembled Inclination to worſhip this wonderful Infant, was only a Contrivance, thereby to gain an Opportunity of deſtroying him.

But now, Had all theſe things been conſidered, Intereſt, and Paſſion, and Prejudice apart; Was it not very natural to ſuppoſe, that the Appearance of an extraordinary Star, the Zeal of thoſe Travellers, the concurrent Teſtimony of the *Jewiſh* Doctors, ſhould have ſuggeſted, that Providence had a more than common Concern in all this Matter? Ought it not in reaſon to have been preſumed, that the Wiſemen, who diſappointed his Expectations, and yet lay under no viſible temptation to diſobey him, had met with ſome ſuch overruling Direction, which diverted them another way in their return home, as they had found before, in their Journey thither? And, was it not a very obvious Concluſion from all this, that God had diſcovered his Hypocriſy, and ſet himſelf againſt his wicked Intentions?

That therefore it were fitter for him to repent of the paſt, than to engage in any new attempts, ſo impoſſible to be concealed, ſo unlikely to proſper? Theſe Inferences, I ſay, might much more reaſonably have been deduced, from what had paſſed in the whole courſe of this Affair, than any of thoſe, to which *Herod* converted it. So that, upon the whole, Providence did not, by theſe Events, fix, or unavoidably ordain, the Effects of them, but left them free to be applied to Good or Ill Purpoſes. Nay, they were rather applicable to Good than Evil; But ſtill capable of Either, According to the Will and Diſpoſition of the Party, concerned to make his uſe of them.

Now it is farther to be conſidered, that, altho' our corrupt Nature have a moſt unhappy Tendency to Evil; Yet, to thoſe who will incline to it, there is always at hand a Principle above Nature, correcting that propenſion, and drawing them to Good. And this I conceive, to be imparted not only to very Good Men, but, in ſome convenient meaſure, to all that are not very Bad Men. The force of this, like that other Principle it works againſt, is ſtrengthened by Compliance and Cuſtom. And, as the Corruption of our Nature will not hurt us, except we indulge and inflame it; So neither will the Influence of Grace forſake us, except we reſiſt and quench it. Herein, it is true, is a mighty difference; That our Corruption is born with us, but Grace is given us freely; And therefore Grace muſt be liable to ſuch Conditions, for its Continuance and Increaſe, as the infinitely Wiſe and Good Giver thinks fit to ſuſpend it upon. But, ſince the Benefit of the Receiver is what he chiefly aims at; we may depend upon it, that the ſame Kindneſs, which prevailed for the giving, will equally prevail for continuing the Gift, ſo long as it is thankfully received, and duly improved. On the other hand, if this Bounty be repaid with Ingratitude and Contempt; we are not to wonder, that the Giver does not ſo far contribute to His own Diſhonour, as the not withdrawing the ſlighted Inſtances of His Love,

and

and ſeeming to contend in vain with inſolent and inſenſible Wretches, muſt needs do.

Now we muſt not ſuppoſe God moved, by ſuch partial and unaccountable Tenderneſs, in diſtinguiſhing Men by his Favour, as We ourſelves are. He always gives, and takes away, with reaſon. Thoſe whom He once loves, He loves unto the end, provided they be careful to continue in His Love. He muſt do ſo, becauſe, ſuppoſing no ſuch provocation, as ſhould alter His Affection, the ſame ground of loving them ſtill remains. And He, as I ſaid, proceeds not upon Paſſion and Humour, which have their Ebbings and Flowings; but upon Equity and Reaſon, which are a Meaſure certain, and ſteady, and laſting. And thus much, I think, may ſerve to convince us, that They who loſe the Grace of God, finally, loſe it by their own fault.

But ſtill it would be known what it is to loſe the Grace of God, with regard to the Caſe before us. And in order hereunto, let us obſerve, that the Grace I am now ſpeaking of, is a ſecret Operation of the Spirit of God upon the Hearts of Men; Which, by a wonderful, but gentle and ſecret, concurrence with their own Wills and Faculties, gives a new turn to their thoughts; Diſpoſes them to attend to, and ſee the Reaſonableſs of their Duty; Repreſents the Arguments for doing well in their true light; and gives thoſe Arguments ſuch a happy and powerful influence upon the Affections, as brings theſe into Obedience to the Governing part of the mind. And all this is directly oppoſite to that Depravity of Nature, which tempts Men to be heady and unperſuadable, to overlook and leſſen the Motives to Virtue, and lean eternally to the ſide of Senſe and rebellious Appetite.

When therefore we are told of *Mens hardening their hearts in Sin*: The meaning is, that they have ſo frequently, and ſo long, given way to their vicious Inclinations, and turned the deaf Ear to the better Motions of God's Spirit, that its Checks and Admonitions do no longer make any Impreſſion upon their Minds.

And

And when we are told, that *God hardens mens hearts*; This is not ſo to be underſtood, as if He did infuſe any new and poſitive Diſpoſition to do wickedly: But only, that he withdraws thoſe Aſſiſtances, which They, by obſtinate and cuſtomary Sinning, have rendered ineffectual to their Reformation: And ſo leaves off thus to check or admoniſh them at all. Then their own vicious Inclinations, and the Temptations of the Devil, are in their full force. And this ceaſing to oppoſe the Powers of his Grace againſt Theſe, ſeems to be all that the Scripture intends, by hardening Them, who had firſt hardened themſelves.

Now what Injuſtice, what Hardſhip can we charge ſuch a Proceeding with; Which, upon the matter, amounts to no more, than after many trials, and tenders of Kindneſs, leaving off to perſuade, and urge, and ſtrive with, Wretches who will not ſuffer themſelves to be perſuaded, and overcome, to their own Advantage? This is not tempting, nor compelling Men to ſin, but giving them over to their own perverſe Choice; It is only a Permiſſion of that Evil, which, in ſuch Circumſtances, does not appear poſſible to be prevented, without breaking in upon the Original Conſtitution of rational Agents, and forcing us to be good, whether we will or no.

Mean while, the miſerable ſtate of ſuch abandoned Sinners is very manifeſt, becauſe that Reſtraint is taken off, which alone can preſerve them from Ruin. For nothing more is neceſſary to their certain undoing, than to expoſe them to the aſſaults of their Spiritual Adverſary, naked and deſtitute of proper Helps and Defence. In ſuch caſes, our Wills take part with the Enemy; and the Biaſs upon them is ſo ſtrong, that there is no Crime ſo black, into which we are not capable of being drawn. Every Diſpenſation of Providence is then taken by the wrong handle; Conſcience is ſilenced, Reaſon darkened, its firſt and brighteſt Impreſſions defaced, and even good-nature, and common Humanity, outgrown, and worn away. Thus

Herod, when under the Power of Anger, and Jealouſy, and Envy, turned all the Warnings, and extraordinary Notices of the Meſſiah, into freſh Incentives to Treachery and Cruelty; Made uſe of his Authority to gratify his Revenge, and committed a Murder upon Multitudes of Infants, which one would very hardly ſuppoſe it poſſible for a Prince, a Father, or indeed any manner of Man, to be guilty of.

And yet, whatever horror we conceive (and ſure the utmoſt we can conceive, is no more than juſt, to ſuch unrelenting Barbarity) even *Herod*, in his blackeſt Colours, is no other, than the true Image of every abandoned Sinner. For each of Us, when not enlightened, aſſiſted, reſtrained, by the Grace of God, is liable to be as utterly loſt to every ſort of good Diſpoſition, to be as vehemently bent upon the moſt deteſtable Wickedneſs, as this raging Prince in the full Career of his Fury. So very Slippery is our Standing, unleſs we take good heed to be guided, by that unſeen Arm that ſupports us: So very wretched are we all, when forſaken of God, and left to ourſelves; Such remorſeleſs *Herods*, when at the Mercy of the Tempter, and in the Hand of our own ungoverned Paſſions. But,

IV. *Fourthly*, Some have objected againſt the Maſſacre of ſo many harmleſs Babes upon Chriſt's account, that it was a mighty hardſhip, and reflects upon the Juſtice, and Goodneſs, of the Divine Providence. So that I cannot think the ſubject of this Day ſpoken to as it ought, till ſome endeavour have been uſed to clear this Difficulty. In order whereunto, let it be remember'd, that, from what was diſcourſed under the laſt Particular, it manifeſtly follows, that God is no farther concerned in This, or any other Crimes, than barely as he permits the Commiſſion of them. And if, as was there argued, it be no imputation upon his Juſtice and Goodneſs, to ſuffer Men in the *Sin* of deſigning, and acting, the worſt, the baſeſt, the crueleſt Villainies; Then the next, and only remaining Enquiry will be, whether the Providence of God be concerned to hinder

the *Calamity*: That is, Whether it be any reaſonable reflection upon the Wiſdom, the Juſtice, the Goodneſs of God, who can forbid and defeat them, to ſuffer ſuch Deſigns to take effect upon the Innocent, who are marked out, to be oppreſſed, or cut off by them.

Now here a mighty Difference muſt be made, between Men's ſuffering unjuſtly, with regard to Men, who are the next Actors and Inſtruments, and with regard to God, who is the remote Cauſe, of theſe Events to them. Men may afflict, cruſh, and murder thoſe who have given them no Provocation, and whom they have no manner of right to treat as they do. But God hath an univerſal and unlimited Dominion over us, as Creatures; and We have ſtrengthened that Title, yet more, by forfeiting our Lives, and all the Comforts of them, as Sinners. Conſequently, how unjuſt ſoever any of our Sufferings may be, in reſpect of Men, who are the immediate Inflicters: yet in reſpect of God, of whoſe deſerved Vengeance Men are the Executioners, the extremeſt Sufferings of the very Beſt People never are, never can be, unjuſt.

But this is not all. For we are to conſider the preſent Life, not as our laſt and final State of Being, but looking forward, and leading on, to another. Nor were we created and ſent into the World, purely for This, but principally for that future, State. And ſo no certain Meaſure can be taken, no right or peremptory Judgment can be made, of God's Juſtice and Goodneſs towards us, without taking in the Diſtributions of that Life, which is the End of our Living at all. But now the Scriptures have expreſly declared, that Sufferings are a part of our Diſcipline and Trial; that all the Sufferings of our mortal Condition ſhall be therefore recompenſed, with immortal Happineſs and Glory; and that, provided we receive our Puniſhment, as we ought, whatever Offences are puniſhed here, ſhall be forgiven hereafter.

Suppoſe a Servant then indebted to his Maſter, in a vaſt Sum of Money: Suppoſe him injuriouſly treated,

and ſpoiled of his Goods, by a Fellow-Servant, to whom he owes nothing: If what this Servant loſe by ſuch ill Treatment, be abated him, in the Arrear due to his Maſter, that Servant is no Loſer by ſuch Injury: And, if a great deal more be given him, in conſideration of what was ſo wrongfully taken away; then it is plain, that, upon making up the whole Account, he is at laſt a Gainer by this Exchange. Now juſt thus our Great Lord deals with his Servants; And this Profit he turns all thoſe things to, which his own Judgments, or the Malice of wicked Men, do, by his Connivance, lay upon them here below. So much as they endure with Meekneſs, and Patience, and a holy Reſignation to his Divine Will; ſo much he diſcounts from what they have deſerved to endure hereafter. And, tho' this be not ſtrictly the Caſe of the Innocents, before us; Who, not being in a Capacity of inflaming their Reckoning, by actual and wilful Tranſgreſſions, could not ſtand in need of the ſame Deductions with others; Yet ſtill the other Branch of the Argument holds good, which proceeds upon the giving his Servants ſome better thing, in Reparation of the Loſſes, ſuſtained in their preſent State. It is allowed, theſe Infants wanted the Will of Martyrdom, which riper Years may have; But then it muſt be allowed too, that they were clear of that voluntary and actual Guilt, which thoſe riper Years would have contracted. The whole Matter then ſeems to ſtand thus: Temporal Death is the Puniſhment of Original Sin. This God had a Right to inflict, and to chuſe his own Time and Manner of doing it. And therefore Convulſions, or a Fever, or any other mortal Diſeaſe, incident to that tender Age, is as much a Reflection upon the Providence of God, as the permitting them to fall by the Sword, a Sacrifice to the Rage of a mercileſs Tyrant.

But then for a frail, a ſhort, a troubleſome, a dangerous Life, God gave them the Recompence of an immortal, a ſecurely happy, a compleatly glorious One. Happy in ſuch a Degree, as to conſider their Innocence and their Sufferings, and the noble Fruit, which might have

have ſprung from thoſe tender Plants, had they been allowed to grow to full Maturity. Herein then, not only the Juſtice of God is vindicated, but his Liberality, and the Goodneſs of his Providence, was glorified. For happy ſure were They, who ſo quickly made their Port. Happy, who ſo eſcaped the Storms and Hazards, the Temptations and Defilements, of a boiſterous and naughty World. Happy, who received ſo bountiful a Reward for that Injuſtice of a barbarous Murderer, who ſaved moſt effectually, whom he meant to deſtroy; and ſent them before, into the Joy of Him, for whoſe ſake they became a Prey to implacable Malice, and unrelenting Fury.

V. *Fifthly*, In the midſt of ſo many melancholy Obſervations, we have this to comfort us, that *Herod*, notwithſtanding all his Endeavours to make the Deſtruction of our Saviour ſure, was yet diſappointed. And indeed the Vanity of wicked Men is ſcarcely more conſpicuous in any one Inſtance, than in the fond Imaginations they flatter themſelves with, of being able to compaſs their Ends, in rooting out thoſe, whom God reſolves to preſerve. He may, and does, ſuffer their miſchievous Intentions to ſucceed, ſometimes, and in ſome degree; but, when he pleaſes to interpoſe, no Subtelty, no Force, not all the Counſels, not all the Armies upon Earth, not all the Stratagems in either, can prevail. For His is that watchful Eye, ever open to diſcover the Snares of Death laid for his beloved ones. His that over-ruling Hand, that hews them in pieces, and ſays to the Overflowings of Ungodlineſs, as well as to thoſe of the Great Deep, *Hither ſhall ye go, and no farther, and here will I ſtop your proud Waves.* In ſhort, he ſo orders the Matter, that, both by the Succeſſes he permits, and by thoſe he forbids, his own Glory, and the Good of his faithful Servants, ſhall moſt certainly be promoted.

The Ways of bringing this about are various. Sometimes he does it by an immediate, viſible, and miraculous

culous Exertion of his Almighty Power;
Acts xii. And thus St. *Peter* was releaſed out of Priſon, when Chains, and Bars, and Iron-Gates, opened to him of their own accord. Sometimes by cutting ſhort the Enemy, and ſweeping them away with a ſwift Deſtruction; and thus the Hoſt of *Aſſyrians*,
Iſai. xxxvii. who lay ready to devour *Jeruſalem*, were in One Night ſlain by a deſtroying Angel. At other times, by preventing Surprizes, giving timely Warnings, and furniſhing Leiſure and Opportu-
Ver. 13. nities for an Eſcape; and thus *Joſeph* here was, *with the young Child and his Mother*, diſpatched away into *Egypt*. But be it by Theſe, or by any other Methods, that ſuch merciful Intentions take effect; ſtill *It is the Lord's doing:* And the Natural Inference from hence, to all that attend to theſe Events as they ought, will be that mentioned by the Pſalmiſt,
Pſal. lviii. 10. *Verily there is a Recompence for the Righteous, Doubtleſs there is a God that judgeth in the Earth.*

Such are the Obſervations proper for this Feſtival, which we ſhall do well to improve, and apply in the following manner.

1. The diſmal Effects of *Herod*'s Ambition and Rage ſhould warn us always to behave ourſelves with Temper and Moderation. Eſpecially that we do ſo, when our Enemies, or thoſe that provoke us, lie at our Mercy. Greatneſs and Wealth are apt to turn our Heads. But the Effects of Inſolence to their Brethren are never more deplorable, than when Men have the Temptation of Power, to cruſh thoſe deſpiſed things that lie below them. Of all Perſons therefore Anger is leaſt proper for Princes, who can ſcatter Death and Deſolation, with a Word of their Mouths. And, in proportion, it muſt miſbecome all Superiors to their Inferiors: becauſe this Paſſion generally ſpurs Men on, to do the utmoſt they can do; and Men are ſcarce ever very angry, without being very unjuſt. It is fit then this unthinking, unruly Evil, ſhould be held in with

Bit

Bit and Bridle; and, the leſs any Man's Condition reſtrains him, from making his Reſentments of tragical Conſequence to others; the ſeverer Reſtraint, and more ſteady Government, ought ſuch a Man to keep over himſelf.

2. The Steps, taken by *Herod*, toward this deſperate Wickedneſs, ſhould particularly deter us from Hypocriſy and Diſſimulation. But above all, from that moſt impious Inſtance of it, the pretending Religion for a Cover to any unlawful and deviliſh Contrivances. For I cannot but think it proper to obſerve, that the Next thing we hear of *Herod*, after his diſſembled Intention to come and worſhip Jeſus, when his real Intent was to kill him, is the barefaced Butchery of this Day. And thus it often happens. Men find a formal Shew of Religion cannot compaſs thoſe Ends, it was put on to ſerve, or to diſguiſe; and then they preſently throw off the Maſk, and lay aſide all Shame, all manner of regard for God and their Duty. Nor is it indeed much to be wondered at, that thoſe Wretches ſhould be given over to the blackeſt of Crimes, and moſt fatal of all Deluſions; who have ſinned againſt their beſt Remedy, and proſtituted the very Ordinances of God, to an Artifice for rendering themſelves more ſucceſsful, in carrying on the Service of the Devil.

3. What hath been argued in Vindication of the Divine Juſtice and Goodneſs, with regard to the Sin of *Herod*, and the Death of theſe Children, ſhould diſpoſe us to entertain, with Patience and much Meekneſs, not only the Sufferings laid upon us by God's immediate Hand, but likewiſe thoſe, which we endure from the wrongful Dealings of wicked and unreaſonable Men. The Injuſtice cannot, in this Caſe, be greater than *Herod*'s, nor can our Innocence be more, than that of thoſe Infants. Since then we have been taught by this Example, that Perſons, the moſt inoffenſive and undeſerving, may be perſecuted even to the Death, without any juſt Reflection, either upon their own Virtue thus oppreſs'd, or that Providence which permits it to

be ſo oppreſsd: Our Method in this Caſe ſhould be, to take Sanctuary in the Peace of a good Conſcience, to look up with a holy Reſignation of Mind to the wiſe Diſpoſer of every Event; and to truſt his Mercy, for the neceſſary Comforts, the abundant Compenſation, of all the Hardſhips he ſees fit for us to undergo. Which yet we ſhould not undergo any one of, were it not more for His Honour, nay, more for Our Advantage, to have it thus than otherwiſe. For

4. The Remembrance of *Herod*'s Diſappointment ſhould quicken, and eſtabliſh our Hope and Faith in God. When Dangers hem us in, and our *Enemies on every ſide thruſt ſore at us that we may fall*, then let us call to mind, that He, who reſcued his own Son, can never want means to deliver any Son or Servant of His, when ſuch Deliverance is ſeaſonable and proper. But temporal Deliverances are not always Seaſonable, not always moſt beneficial. And therefore our chief and moſt earneſt Deſire ſhould be, that we may find his Aſſiſtance and Protection always at hand, to ſupport us in our Spiritual Encounters. For let our preſent Difficulties be what they will, all will certainly be well at laſt, provided he do but grant the Petition offered up to him this Day; That is, *So to mortify and kill all Vices in us, that by the Innocency of our Lives, and the Conſtancy of our Faith even unto Death, we may glorify his holy Name, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.* Amen.

The Sunday after CHRISTMAS-*Day.*

The COLLECT the ſame with that of *Chriſtmas-Day.*

The EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE.

1, 2. I would not be thought by any thing that went be-

Gal. iv 1.

1. *NOW I ſay that the Heir, as long as he is a Child, differeth nothing from a Servant, though he be Lord of all;*

2. *But*

2. *But is under Tutors and Governors, until the time appointed of the Father.*

fore, to derogate from the juſt Privileges of the *Jewiſh* Church. 'Tis certain they were deſigned by God to inherit the Promiſes made by God to *Abraham*, from whom they deſcended. But the difference between that and the Chriſtian Diſpenſation, may be conveniently enough repreſented, by the Caſe of an Heir under Age. Who, though he have an undoubted Title to his Father's Eſtate, is yet, during his minority, kept under ſuch diſcipline, as is proper for the Circumſtances of his Age and Education, and committed to the Care of Directors and Teachers, who exerciſe Authority over him, as if he were a common Servant. And this ſubjection he continues in, till the ſtate of Manhood, and the time, prefixed for his taking poſſeſſion of his Eſtate, is come.

3. *Even ſo We, when we were Children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.*
4. *But when the fulneſs of time was come, God ſent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the Law,*
5. *To redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of Sons.*

3, 4, 5. Thus, though the Church of God, like that Heir, was ſtill but one and the ſame, yet it was treated differently, according to the different Exigencies and Capacities of the Perſons whereof it was compoſed. In its imperfect State with more Rigour, burdenſome Ceremonies, and ſuch ſervile Inſtances of Obedience, as were ſuited to the ſtate of its Childhood. But, when arrived to maturity, the method was changed. For then God ſent his own Son into the World, who was born of a Virgin, and ſubmitted to that Law then in force; that by his punctual obſervance of it, they, who, till then, lived under it, might be freed from any farther obligation to obſerve it. And, thus freed, might be adopted for his ſake into Sons, come under a more manly way of living, and pay from thenceforth an Obedience, agreeable to the Liberty and Privileges of Sons.

6. *And becauſe ye are Sons, God hath ſent forth the Spirit of his Son into your Hearts, crying Abba, Father.*

6. As a Conſequence and Proof of which Sonſhip this common Father hath communicated the Spirit of his own Natural and Begotten, to you his adopted, Sons, Which aſſures you of this Adoption, and that you may now call and addreſs yourſelves to God as a Father, with all the Confidence of being owned and accepted by him, which that relation can juſtify, and uſes to inſpire.

7. *Wherefore thou art no more a Servant, but a Son; and if a Son, then an Heir of God through Chriſt.*

7. Remember then the dignity, to which thou art exalted, and aſſert the Privileges

Privileges belonging to it. Act henceforth not like a Servant, but conſider thyſelf as a Son, nay, as an Heir; for Sons adopted are always ſuch. And ſuch art Thou, an Heir through hope of the Kingdom and Glory, which Chriſt, God's natural Son, hath by Birthright; and Thou in right, and for the ſake, of what he hath done for thee.

COMMENT.

THE Apoſtle's main Deſign in this Epiſtle, and particularly in that Portion of it now before Us, is to juſtify the Liberty, taught and taken by Chriſtians, in not ſubmitting to the Yoke of the *Jewiſh* Law; To aſſert the Pre-eminence of the Goſpel above that Law; And to ſhew, how that Liberty, he ſo ſtrenuouſly argues for, came to belong to the Diſciples of Jeſus Chriſt.

For a right underſtanding, wherein the true Force of his Reaſoning upon this Occaſion lies, it will be neceſſary to obſerve theſe following Particulars.

1. He allows, and maintains, the Church of God to have been all along One and the Same. And therefore the *Jewiſh*, and the Chriſtian Church, when oppoſed to each other, are to be looked upon, not as Two collective Bodies, perfectly diſtinct; but as One Body, under different States and Capacities. This is very evident, from the *Five* Firſt Verſes of the Chapter, which illuſtrate the Matter, by a Compariſon, taken from a very familiar Inſtance in civil Affairs. A Compariſon, not of Two different Perſons, an Heir and no Heir; but of One and the ſame Perſon with himſelf, diſtinguiſhed according to different Times and Circumſtances; the Heir while a Child, and the Heir arrived to Maturity of Age and underſtanding; The Former at the *Firſt* and *Third*, with the Latter at the *Fourth* Verſe.

2. Theſe Diſpenſations are to be underſtood, not as contrary, but only introductory, the One to the Other. This is evidently the meaning of that Paſſage, in the Third Chapter, Ver. 24. which calls *the Law* our

Pædagogue

Pædagogue or *Schoolmaſter*, *to bring us to Chriſt.* So is it likewiſe of the Alluſion here, which deſcribes the *Elements of the World*, as a *Bondage expedient for Children*, a Diſcipline fitted to the Imperfection of Beginners; and conſequently to ceaſe in courſe, when the Condition of the Parties concerned in it, ſhould render them capable of a more liberal Treatment, and more perfect Methods of Inſtruction. Accordingly it follows, in that other place juſt quoted, *But after that Faith is come, we are no longer under a Schoolmaſter.* Chap. iii. 25. And this gives us one good Reaſon, why the Deſign of our Redemption, by the Teaching, and Incarnation, and Sufferings of the Son of God, though laid from all Eternity, was yet put in Execution no ſooner. God, in this, like the reſt of his Dealings with Mankind, condeſcending to, and ſuffering their Weakneſſes; waiting till *the fulneſs of time was come*; and bringing them forward, by ſuch gentle and leiſurely Steps, as their preſent Condition qualified them for. Ver. 4. Boyle's *Lectures* 1701. *Serm.* 6. But of this I have elſewhere given a more large Account, and mention it here, only by the way.

3. When the Adoption, and the Graces of the Spirit, the Sonſhip and Inheritance, are here aſcribed to the Goſpel, as its proper Effects and Privileges; This is not ſo to be underſtood, as if none of thoſe good Men, who lived before our Lord's appearing in the Fleſh, had any part at all in ſuch Advantages. For many excellent Perſons there were, even then, whoſe Faith was vigorous and penetrating enough to ſee through the Veil, and, who, if I may ſo ſay, did anticipate theſe clearer Revelations, and the Benefits of the New Covenant. As on the other hand, there are vaſt Numbers now, who, tho' the Veil be long ſince done away, yet have it to this Day upon their Hearts. But neither the One, nor the Other, of theſe Caſes affects the Apoſtle's Argument in the leaſt. And that for this plain Reaſon, Becauſe the Compariſon here proceeds, not between Perſons and Perſons, but between Diſ-

penſation

penſation and Diſpenſation: Not between Theſe again, ſo far as the One reſembled, prefigured, implied, concurred with, the Other; but in reſpect of thoſe parts only, which are peculiar to Each, and quite diſtinct from the Other. Much leſs between Theſe. *Laſtly*, With regard to the Effects actually produced by Either; But purely with regard to their reſpective Genius and Temper, and their Aptneſs and natural Tendency to produce ſuch or ſuch Effects. And therefore, as it is no juſt Reflection upon the Goſpel, that Some, who live under it, are ſtill acted by a *Spirit of Bondage*; Becauſe this is the Fault of the Men, and not of the Diſpenſation: So neither is it any juſt Commendation of the Law, that ſome under That too were acted even then by a *Spirit of Adoption*; Becauſe this was not the Excellence of the Law ſtrictly taken, but of the Men; whoſe more advanced Piety, and Spiritual Knowledge, attended to thoſe Dawnings of the Goſpel, which at that diſtance ſhone in upon their Hearts. And to the Influence of theſe it was, not to the Law, conſidered abſtractedly and apart from the Goſpel, that thoſe then uncommon Attainments, and Privileges, were entirely owing.

4. From hence it will be no hard Matter, in the *Fourth* Place, to ſtate the true Difference between theſe Two; and to explain wherein the Prerogatives of the Goſpel above the Law conſiſt. The Law burdened Men with Carnal Ordinances, and Ceremonies in themſelves unprofitable. Ordinances, that had a Spiritual Meaning, but ſuch, as few of the Perſons exerciſed in them, entered into; Ceremonies too of Uſe, ſo far as they were Typical; but the Shadow was ſo thick, as greatly to intercept the Subſtance. The Goſpel propounds to us a Service entirely rational, and pure, and Spiritual. It leaves no Cloud between, to confound our Sight; but carries us directly to Jeſus Chriſt, the Antitype; the Accompliſhment, *The End of the Law to every one that believeth*. The Promiſes and Threatenings then were Temporal in Terms, though of Mercies and Puniſhments

niſhments eternal by Implication: But theſe are now expreſly of Things Future and Eternal: and the Temporal are no longer the proper Rewards, but only the Additional Encouragements, of our Obedience. The Revelations of the Divine Will were then partial and dark, they are now explicit and full. The Graces of the Holy Spirit were then ſparingly exhibited, and few ſeem to have received them in large Meaſures; becauſe that few gave themſelves the Trouble of applying to the Spiritual Myſteries, ſignified by the outward Figures: This Spirit now is diſtributed liberally, to all who are diſpoſed to aſk, and receive, and improve by it. But ſtill the Aſſiſtance of the Spirit was a Goſpel-Privilege, and never belonged to the Law, farther than that *Firſt* included this *Second* Covenant. Hence was the Service then mercenary, and the greater part, who paid it, were acted by a Principle of Fear; The Scourge always over them, and the Wages down in hand; The Work toilſome, and the Profit ſmall: But Ours now proceeds upon more generous Motives, as inſpired by Faith and Love. Our Buſineſs is more manly and ingenuous; Our Expectations vaſt, beyond what we are able to aſk or think: And not an Hire, but an Inheritance. So diſtant is the Condition, of thoſe Servants, and theſe Sons: Of an Oeconomy, under which it was very rare to riſe above the Station and Diſpoſition of Servants; and of One, in which nothing ſervile remains, but all are in a Capacity, of being *Sons*, and not only *Sons*, but *Heirs, of God thro' Chriſt.*

Now, in regard this is a Promotion, the conferring whereof St. *Paul* makes the peculiar Glory of the Goſpel, and an Effect worthy our Lord's Incarnation to procure for us; And conſequently ſuch, as a right Apprehenſion of muſt needs raiſe our Thankfulneſs and our Wonder, while our Hearts are ſtill warm with the annual Remembrance of that Myſtery of Love: Wiſely to be ſure, does the Church offer it to our Meditation this Day. And, in hope to ſerve the good Purpoſes

of

of Her doing ſo, my preſent Diſcourſe ſhall be employed upon it.

The Privilege of being Sons and Heirs is here repreſented as One, the Latter a neceſſary Conſequence of the Former. And it is our ineſtimable Happineſs, that theſe are never ſeparated in Fact. But ſo it is likewiſe, that when they be (as be they may) ſeparated in our Conſideration; Each of them ſingly ſuggeſts ſuch Variety of Matter, as would more than ſuffice for the uſual Limits of a Diſcourſe. And therefore I ſhall now confine myſelf to the *Firſt*, reſerving the *Second* for another Opportunity, which the Method I am engaged in, will put into my Hands hereafter *.

* *Epiſtle for* 8 *Sunday after* Trinity.

The Manner of treating this Subject ſhall be

I. *Firſt*. To ſhew, under what Notion or Character it is, that Chriſtians are properly the *Sons of God*.

II. *Secondly*, To obſerve what are the Conditions, that concur to the making that Title good to us. But,

III. *Thirdly* and principally, To preſs upon you ſome Reflections, proper to poſſeſs us with a becoming Senſe, both of our Advantage, and our Duty, upon this Occaſion.

I. *Firſt*, I begin with ſhewing, under what Notion or Character it is, that Chriſtians are properly the Sons of God. And it is neceſſary to explain this Point, becauſe this Relation to God is attributed in Scripture, to very different Subjects, and upon very different Accounts. He is called the * *Father of the Rain*, and *Begetter of the Drops of the Dew*, becauſe the Inanimate Parts of the Creation derive their Being from him. The Angels are called *his* † *Sons*, becauſe Spirits of a Spirit, and ſo neareſt reſembling him, of any part of created Nature. So are the Spirits of

* Job xxxviii. 28.

† Ibid. v. 7.

of Good Men departed to a State of Immortality, becauſe *they cannot die* ‖ *any more*, and in this *are equal to the Angels.* * *Adam* is called ſo, becauſe framed by his immediate Hand. The Bleſſed Jeſus is called ſo, becauſe formed in the Womb of an unblemiſhed Virgin, by the † Operation of the Holy Ghoſt. But he is ſo called, yet more properly, becauſe his ‖ *own*, his * *begotten*, his † *Only* Son, becauſe of the ſame Nature, and One ‖ with him from all Eternity. Now it is manifeſt, that, of theſe ſeveral Acceptations, Some cannot poſſibly belong to us at Any time; Others not now, tho' they may hereafter; and of the Reſt, which may at preſent, none can be peculiar to us, as Chriſtians. And yet, under this Character alone, we are here intitled Sons; and at the ſame time told, how we were made ſo, which is by *Adoption.*

‖ Luke xx. 36.

* Luke iii. 38.

† Luke i. 35.
‖ Rom. viii. 32.
* 1 John v. 1.
† John iii. 16.
‖ John i. 1. x. 30.
Rom. ix. 5.
Heb. i. 2, 3.

Now Adoption, (as appears from the Laws and Cuſtoms of the Countries where it hath obtained) is an Act of Favour, whereby the Maſter of an Eſtate takes Perſons of another Stock, and receives them, as his own Children. Theſe Perſons ſo received, if Slaves before, are hereby freed of Courſe; And then, as Freemen they take the Name, and ſucceed to a Right of the Inheritance, of the Adopter. All which was publickly tranſacted, and the mutual conſent of all parties ſolemnly declared, before a publick Magiſtrate. This is the Account given us of that, which the Lawyers called *Adrogation*, or perfect *Adoption.* A Method contrived for the continuance of Names, and ſupport of Families; and for the Conſolation of Thoſe, who either might have expected, but never had any Children; or who were by Death deprived of them they had.

Vinn. in Inſt. Tit. xi. Lib. 1.

They, who at all underſtand the nature and uſe of Similitudes, are not ſo unreaſonable, as to require, in Any Caſe, an exact Agreement in every Circumſtance.

Much

Much leſs can we expect it, where God and Men, and their reſpective Actions, are the Terms of the compariſon. It ought to content us in this Caſe, if there be reſemblance ſufficient to juſtify the Alluſion; and, that this hold ſo far, in ſome of the main Strokes, as to give us a tolerable notion of the thing, and to render that expreſſion more proper than any other.

Now here is, in like manner, an act of marvellous Grace, in ſuffering Wretches, who before were Aliens and Strangers, nay Slaves to the Enemy of Souls, and ſold under Sin, to be firſt taken into Liberty, and then into the Family of that God, from whom they had eſtranged themſelves. And this too, upon the Death of an only Son, not reducing his Father indeed to any want of natural Iſſue, or a neceſſity of ſupplying himſelf this way; but taking our Nature, and becoming the Son of Man, that we might thereby become the Sons of God. Dying in that Nature to deliver us from the Curſe, to which every Partaker of it was liable; and ſo purchaſing for us that Freedom, which was a neceſſary qualification, and ſtep to our Adoption. Devolving by this Means his Merits, and his Claims, upon Us; drawing us as near to a Natural Sonſhip, as the Condition of the thing would bear. Vouchſafing to be One with us, and in us; And to make Us One with, and in Him; And ſo to convey to us a good and legal aſſurance of a ſhare, (as large a ſhare as we are capable of) in thoſe Advantages, and Glories, and Royalties, which he hath an indefeaſible right to, by natural Deſcent. Thus the Son is ſaid to have *loved us, and waſhed us in his own Blood*, and to have *made us Kings and Prieſts unto God and his Father*.

Rev. i. 5, 6.

Thus it is ſaid, that *He which Sanctifieth, and they who are Sanctified, are all of one: for which cauſe he is not aſhamed to call them Brethren*; that in regard *the Children are partakers of fleſh and blood, he alſo himſelf took part of the ſame, that thro' Death he might deliver them, who were all their lifetime ſubject to bondage*. Thus the Father is ſaid to have

Heb. ii. 11, 14, 15.

pre-

predeſtinated us to the Adoption of Children by Jeſus Chriſt to himſelf, according to the good Pleaſure of his Will to the Praiſe and Glory of his Grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved, in whom we have Redemption through his Blood. And once more in the Scripture now under Conſideration, that *God ſent forth his Son,* (and conſequently a Son before he was ſent forth;) that this Son was *made of a Woman,* (very Man of the Subſtance of his Virgin Mother) *made under the Law,* (ſubmitting to, and punctually diſcharging thoſe temporary Ordinances, which he came to aboliſh) for ſo it follows, *to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the Adoption of Sons.*

Eph. i. 5, 6, 7.

Ver. 4, 5.

From all this it appears, that, ſo far as the free Good-will of the Adopter, and the Advantages accruing to the Perſons Adopted, are concerned; the Alluſion is juſt and good. And theſe are the Principal Parts in the Compariſon. If the Motives to it, and the Methods made uſe of in it, do not come up to the ſame reſemblance, we are not to wonder. Becauſe this is an Inſtance of Love, of which none but God, who is Love itſelf, was capable. And therefore we muſt not, among Men, look to meet with any thing like it, any thing near it. Somewhat more of likeneſs however we may diſcover, with regard to the mutual Conſent required in common Adoptions, under that which I propoſed for my

II. *Second* Head. The Conditions, I mean, that muſt concur, for making this Title good to us. Which, I think, two or three plain Texts may ſuffice to ſhew; Such as that in the *Firſt of St. John*'s Goſpel, at the *twelfth and thirteenth. As many as received him, to them gave he Power to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name; which were born, not of Blood, nor of the will of the Fleſh, nor of the will of Man, but of God.* That this *receiving* Chriſt, and *believing on his*

Name, are terms of like importance, and explanatory of each other, we need no other proof than that given us in the *Third* of this Epiſtle. Where St. *Paul* deſcribing (as here) the Privileges of Chriſtians releaſed from the *Jewiſh* Yoke, ſays, *After that Faith is come, ye are no longer under a Schoolmaſter, for ye are all the Children of God by Faith in Chriſt Jeſus: For as many of you as have been baptized into Chriſt have put on Chriſt.* And once more, in a paſſage parallel to this I am now upon, *As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God.* And, how we are to attain that guidance, I take to be evident, from this Declaration to *Titus*, that God *according to his mercy hath ſaved us by the waſhing of Regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghoſt*; and that other of our Bleſſed Lord himſelf, *Except a Man be born of Water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

Gal. iii. 25, 26, 27.

Rom. viii. 14.

Titus iii. 5.

John iii. 5.

The Sum then of the *Second* Particular amounts to thus much: That God, of his infinite Goodneſs to Mankind, hath condeſcended to advance them to an honourable and happy State, a near Relation to himſelf, ſuch as by Nature they had not, could not have. That this however (though all are capable of it, by Vertue of that Death, which is a Ranſom ſufficient for all) is a Bleſſing, not conferred on all promiſcuouſly: That Faith in Chriſt is a neceſſary qualification for it; and this Faith ſolemnly profeſſed in the Sacrament of Baptiſm, where we enter into Covenant with God, profeſs to be, and are accepted for, His. And, ſince that Water is accompanied by the Spirit, ſince the conferring that Spirit is not only the Privilege but the Proof of our Sonſhip; Moſt truly does our Church teach us to confeſs, that *In Baptiſm we were made the Children of God*; moſt properly after the adminiſtration of that Sacrament, does She *yield hearty Thanks to God*,

Catechiſm, Anſwer 2. Baptiſm of Infants and riper Years.

God, that he hath regenerated the Party *by his Holy* Spirit, received *him for his own by adoption, and made him an Heir of everlaſting Salvation.* The ſhort is, This Adoption belongs to us, not as we are Creatures, or Men, but as we are Believers, and new Creatures in Chriſt. Nor is this limitation of the Bleſſing any Detraction from the freedom of the Gift, or the bounty of the Giver: His Love and Goodneſs ſtill continues the ſole efficient and impulſive Cauſe. Theſe only moved him to beſtow it at all. And therefore, as we have no occaſion to complain of his imparting it to whom, and upon what terms, he ſees fit: So it is ſtill more worthy ſuch a Father, not to vouchſafe the Dignity of Sons, to them that would prove a reproach to the Family they are taken into. It is Grace, muſt make us what Nature cannot: and the Spirit of Him in our Hearts, who died to redeem us from all Iniquity, that alone can warrant us, without arrogance or vanity, to call the Great Lord of Heaven and Earth, what He, to whom we owe this Relation, was pleaſed to ſtile him, when he calls his Diſciples *Brethren, his Father and our Father, His God and Our God.* John xx. 17.

Having thus, as I hope, ſufficiently explained the Nature, and the Conditions, of our Adoption to be Sons of God, I come to

III. The *Third* and *Laſt* part of my Deſign; which is, To preſs ſome Reflections, that may make us ſenſible both of our Privilege, and our Duty, upon this occaſion.

1. The *Firſt* of theſe Reflections St. *John* hath propounded to you already, in the *Third* of his Firſt Epiſtle: *Behold, what manner of Love the Father hath beſtowed upon us, that we ſhould be called the Sons of God.* Upon Us, whether *Jews* or *Gentiles*, bond or free, learned or ignorant, high or low, rich or poor. So differently does the King of Heaven diſpenſe his Favours,

from the manner in uſe with his Vicegerents upon Earth. Theſe, though exalted in Dignity only, but ſtill the ſame in Nature, admit not Thoſe of their Fellow-Creatures, their Fellow-Members, their Brethren, ſo much as to tread their Courts, or to make up their train, whom either meanneſs of Fortune, or deformity of Perſon, or any of thoſe Miſeries, which need the benefit of ſuch acceſs moſt, have rendered Objects of Pity. Yet even Theſe the Son of God is not *aſhamed to call Brethren*; Even Theſe the Father Almighty does not diſdain for his Children: But contracts, invites to, the cloſeſt Alliances, between the Majeſty of God, and the very vileſt of that Duſt and Aſhes framed by him into Man.

So different again is This from the common Adoptions, where the Perſons taken in, were, Either diſtant Kindred, or generally ſuch, as had ſomewhat very extraordinary to recommend them. But We, beſides the meanneſs of our Condition by Nature had no deſerts to boaſt, nothing but what might raiſe an averſion againſt us, no Privileges, but what had been abuſed to the Giver's Diſhonour before. And yet, from this fallen State of Guilt and Unworthineſs, Miſery and Deſpair, we are tranſlated to Favour, and a Hope full of Immortality; from Strangers and Enemies, to Friends and Children; from being the deſerved Objects of God's Hatred, and *Veſſels of Wrath fitted to Deſtruction*, we are embraced in the Arms of his Mercy, and cheriſhed in the boſom of a Father. So much more tender is his Affection, ſo much more kind and free Our Adoption, than any other ever was, or could be.

And, as more free, ſo more beneficial too. For What could the Great Ones upon Earth advance their adſcititious Children to? An uncertain Honour, or a periſhing Poſſeſſion, a ſwelling Title, or an ancient Name. Alas! how poor and little things are theſe, in compariſon with the Favour of a God unchangeable, a treaſure in Heaven, nay a Crown of Glory! We are weak

weak enough oftentimes to bear ourſelves wondrous high, upon the Pompous Pageantry of a long Pedigree; Upon Honours not our own; and perhaps, if the whole Secret were out, not our Anceſtors neither, upon any very creditable Account. (The Effects of Extortion or Bribery, of Falſhood or Treachery, of obſequious miniſtering to the Vices of one above them, exorbitant in his Pride, arbitrary in his Meaſures, or Brutiſh in his Luſts.) Theſe wretched Appearances ſerve to keep People above Contempt, who have nothing of perſonal worth to ſkreen them from it. But the Relation, I am treating of, is an Honour indeed. It lets us into the nobleſt Alliances, It cannot be blown upon by Faction; or ſacrificed to popular Fury; It is never given promiſcuouſly, never taken away unjuſtly. In a Word, to diſcern this wonderful Love in ſome tolerable Meaſure, let us endeavour to frame ſome Idea of the Natural and Only begotten Son of God; and then conſider, that His Bliſs and Glory are reflected down upon the adopted Sons. So near Approaches are permitted us, ſo honourable now is our Condition, from the moſt wretched and ſcandalous that could be; that, as He, who is Love itſelf, could not give leſs, it does not appear how We could receive more, and ſtill continue to be Men.

2. *Secondly*, The Conſideration of our being God's Children is, both a mighty Encouragement in our Duty, and a Direction, with what Spirit and Temper we ſhould go about it. This ſecures us from all thoſe Inſtances of Rigour and Arbitrary Power, which are impoſed, to preſerve the Authority of the Commander, and keep thoſe of inferior Condition at an awful Diſtance. But the Power of every wiſe Parent is tempered with Tenderneſs, and Reſpect to Children; and requires ſuch Acts of Obedience only, as are ingenuous, fit for their Quality, and ſuch as carry their own Motives to compliance along with them.

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weak enough oftentimes to bear ourſelves wondrous high, upon the Pompous Pageantry of a long Pedigree; Upon Honours not our own; and perhaps, if the whole Secret were out, not our Anceſtors neither, upon any very creditable Account. (The Effects of Extortion or Bribery, of Falſhood or Treachery, of obſequious miniſtering to the Vices of one above them, exorbitant in his Pride, arbitrary in his Meaſures, or Brutiſh in his Luſts.) Theſe wretched Appearances ſerve to keep People above Contempt, who have nothing of perſonal worth to ſkreen them from it. But the Relation, I am treating of, is an Honour indeed. It lets us into the nobleſt Alliances, It cannot be blown upon by Faction; or ſacrificed to popular Fury; It is never given promiſcuouſly, never taken away unjuſtly. In a Word, to diſcern this wonderful Love in ſome tolerable Meaſure, let us endeavour to frame ſome Idea of the Natural and Only begotten Son of God; and then conſider, that His Bliſs and Glory are reflected down upon the adopted Sons. So near Approaches are permitted us, ſo honourable now is our Condition, from the moſt wretched and ſcandalous that could be; that, as He, who is Love itſelf, could not give leſs, it does not appear how We could receive more, and ſtill continue to be Men.

2. *Secondly*, The Conſideration of our being God's Children is, both a mighty Encouragement in our Duty, and a Direction, with what Spirit and Temper we ſhould go about it. This ſecures us from all thoſe Inſtances of Rigour and Arbitrary Power, which are impoſed, to preſerve the Authority of the Commander, and keep thoſe of inferior Condition at an awful Diſtance. But the Power of every wiſe Parent is tempered with Tenderneſs, and Reſpect to Children; and requires ſuch Acts of Obedience only, as are ingenuous, fit for their Quality, and ſuch as carry their own Motives to compliance along with them.

This likewiſe takes off that Horror and Dread, wherewith Men, under an abſolute and imperious Maſter, are apt to be confounded, and begets a reaſonable Preſumption of kind Allowances, and great Compaſſion at a Father's Hand. It is upon theſe Accounts, that St. *Paul* prefers the Goſpel-Oeconomy above the Law; calling the Former *the Spirit of Bondage unto Fear*, but the Latter, *The Spirit of Adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father.* That ſhewed Men their Guilt, burdened their Conſciences with Horror and Confuſion, but turned them over to the Goſpel, for Comfort and Relief. For the Goſpel alone ſhews God in Goodneſs and Mercy, reconciled by the Death of his Son. This lays aſide the terrible Aſpect of the Taſkmaſter and the Judge, and brings the mild indulgent Countenance of the Parent, to ſucceed in its Place. Thus the Pſalmiſt does, and thus our own Experience may teach us to deſcribe him: *Like as a Father pitieth his own Children, ſo is the Lord merciful unto them that fear him; for he knoweth whereof we are made, he remembereth that we are but Duſt.* This gives us Confidence, that he, for many Backſlidings, many Wanderings and Strayings, will not yet utterly caſt us off, provided we do but amend at laſt; And that, whenever we return, it is not poſſible for us to deſire more paſſionately to be well received, than he does, that we would give him the Opportunity, of ſhewing how kindly he is diſpoſed to receive us. Much more does this aſſure us, that our ſlips will be overlooked, our Failings kindly interpreted, our Weakneſſes pitied, every thing not directly voluntary not charged in Account to us; but our honeſt, tho' very poor, Endeavours to pleaſe, graciouſly accepted. For none but *Egyptian* Tyrants demand Brick without Straw; And Fathers, leaſt of any, require from Children, what they are ſenſible it is not in their Power to perform.

Rom. viii. 15.

Pſal. ciii. 13, 14.

Hence then we are plainly directed, that the Spirit,

moſt becoming a Chriſtian in his Duty, is ſuch, as inſpires Vigour and Life, Hope and Joy, a Holy Confidence, a chearful and affectionate Obedience. To carry the Torment of Fear about perpetually, and act upon Principles put into us by the Scourge and the Gibbet, is the Miſery of Slaves, unworthy the Character of Free-men, and by no means agreeable, either to the Dignity of a Chriſtian, or the Honour of God. For God is moſt glorified by our Service, when That is made our Choice, and ſprings from Thankfulneſs and Love; When we are fearful to offend, becauſe loth to diſpleaſe; When our Diligence ſpeaks our Deſire of giving Satisfaction; and the Manner of going about it ſhews, we take Delight in our Buſineſs, and are content with our Wages, and have a true reſpect for Him we ſerve. This is the true Temper of every good Servant, much more of every good Child; who cannot, ought not, at leaſt to, conſider his Parent's Indulgence, without inferring from thence his own Obligations to ſerve him with Faithfulneſs, and to ſerve him with Gladneſs too. And therefore, it were in Us moſt inexcuſable to do otherwiſe, who have, as Chriſtians, the higheſt Obligations of this kind; A Father whoſe Goodneſs is infinite, and a Service, that is perfect Freedom.

3. This Conſideration, that we are the Sons of God, ſhould made us exceeding ambitious to be like God. Among Men, we know ſuch Reſemblances are uſual; and extend, not only to Features of Body, but to Temper of Mind, nay to all the Manner and Behaviour of the Parent. And ſuch Likeneſs is commonly very engaging. So that a more than equal Meaſure of Tenderneſs, and Delight, follows the livelieſt Image of the Father. Now, how far we are from any Poſſibility of being like God in our Natural Frame, needs not be ſaid; But, in the Diſpoſition of the Soul we may and muſt arrive at ſome Reſemblance of him. Holineſs and Purity, Juſtice and Charity, and all his communicable Excellencies, may

be drawn, though drawn in Minature only, upon our Hearts. And to ſuch Strokes of Likeneſs St. *Paul* exhorts, when he bids us *be Followers of God as dear Children:* And our bleſſed Saviour when commanding the Love of our Enemies, that we may *be the Children of our Father which is in Heaven.* Both, it is worth obſerving, urge the Neceſſity of the Reſemblance, from the Nearneſs of the Relation. But St. *John* hath a moſt remarkable Text to this Purpoſe: *Beloved, now are we the Sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we ſhall be, but we know that when he ſhall appear we ſhall be like him, for we ſhall ſee him as he is.* Now if our Happineſs hereafter will conſiſt in being like God, and that likeneſs again will follow upon our nearer Approach to, and more diſtinct Knowledge of him: Then it is plain, that our conſtant Deſire, and Care, yea and trueſt Happineſs, in the mean while, muſt be to ſee, and know, and imitate, as much of him, as we can. And that we are extremely to blame, and wanting to ourſelves, in not labouring to approach the Perfections of His Nature; Which indeed is but to finiſh and conſummate thoſe of our Own. This is what he expects, that the Diſtinction of our Family ſhould be viſible upon us. And, if it be remembered, that there is no middle Race of Men, but all are either the Children of God, or Children of the Devil; And that the doing, or not doing, Righteouſneſs is a manifeſt Mark, to which of theſe Two every Man belongs. This is enough to ſhew the neceſſity of a good Life, for attracting our Heavenly Father's Love. For ſure, to preſerve this Divine Relation inviolate between God and Us, I need not ſay, 'tis neceſſary we be not Children of the Devil.

Eph. v. 1. Matth. v. 44, 45.

1 John iii. 2.

1 John iii. 7, 8, 9, 10.

4. If all Chriſtians be the Children of God, then are they likewiſe all mutually allied to one another; And that, in ſuch Degree, as induces the ſtrongeſt Engagements to Juſtice, and Peace, and Charity. When *Moſes* inter-

interpoſed between Two *Iſraelites*, he thought this would, he knew it ought to have been, Motive ſufficient for making up the Quarrel: *Sirs, ye are Brethren, why do ye wrong one to another?* Acts vii. 26.

The Miſchiefs and Hatefulneſs of Strife and Diviſion are but too many and too manifeſt, in People of the greateſt Diſtance from each other. But, when the Venom works under one and the ſame Roof; when They, who came out of the ſame Bowels, and hung upon the ſame Breaſts, are infected; the whole Houſe is preſently in a Flame, and the Feuds grow too unnatural, and too ſcandalous to be borne. And yet even this is not more heinous, more abſurd, than it is among Chriſtians, who have *One Saviour*, *One Spirit*, *One Father*; Who are purchaſed with the ſame Blood, fed and brought up at the ſame Table, begotten and born anew by the ſame Grace, and conſequently are one Flock, one Family, and ought to be of one Heart, and of one Soul. Theſe near Degrees of Kindred ſhould therefore be well thought upon. For, were they not forgotten, it is not eaſy to conceive, how Vices in this regard ſo monſtrous, as Envy and Malice, Contention and Cruelty, or any manner of Hardheartedneſs, ſhould ever get footing, where the Doctrine and Profeſſion of the Goſpel had already taken place.

5. We have, from this Relation to God, an excellent Support under Afflictions. Theſe are repreſented unto us under the Quality of Chaſtiſements; and the Corrections of good Parents are for the moſt part very gentle. Their Severity ſcarce ever more, ſeldom ſo much as is neceſſary. And many a time, when Provocations have lifted up the Hand, Nature ſteps in, and is ſure to prevent, or moderate the Blow. In like manner hath our Heavenly Father his Tenderneſſes and his Yearnings too; his Mercies, and the Sounding of his Bowels towards us. He declares, he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the Children of Men. His Compaſſions are ſaid to exceed thoſe of the moſt affectionate Mothers; Iſai. lxiii. Lam. iii. Iſai. lix.

Mothers: And, though his Wiſdom reſtrain him from ſuch indiſcreet Fondneſs, as would ſpare, when we might profit by Puniſhment; Yet even then, when Juſtice muſt exert, Mercy abates the Strokes, and Wiſdom directs the Remainder to excellent Purpoſes. So that, provided we ſubmit with Patience, till his Ends are anſwered upon us, it is even good for us, that we were in trouble. And, although the Light of God's countenance may retire behind a thick black Cloud for a while; yet all the Father will ſhine forth again, not only in a happy Iſſue out of, but in a glorious Reward for, all our Afflictions.

6. *Laſtly*, This Relation to God gives us aſſured hopes of a gracious anſwer to our Prayers, and ſufficient ſupplies of all neceſſary Proviſions. With regard to the Former, our bleſſed Saviour forbids the uſe of *vain Repetitions*; Upon this Conſideration, that our *Father knoweth what things we have need of before we aſk him.* Aſked indeed he will be; But he requires it more for Our ſakes than his own. Not for the State and Formality of the thing; but to keep up in us a Senſe of our conſtant dependence upon his Goodneſs, and to draw us into a more intimate familiarity with himſelf, by theſe frequent applications to the Throne of Grace. And the remembrance of our being Children, when we come thither, teaches us, not only why, but how we ought to aſk, *viz.* With a becoming Reſignation of Mind, and all due Deference to His Wiſdom, who knows better how to chuſe for us, than we do for ourſelves; With an humble confidence in his Goodneſs, that whatever he ſees moſt expedient, ſhall never be refuſed us; And with a faithful perſeverance in thoſe Requeſts, which, though not always denied when delayed, are yet often delayed, for our much greater benefit. For God is the proper Judge, not only of the Things to be given, but of the Meaſures, and the Seaſons of giving. And therefore to Them, who

Matt. vi. 7, 8.

who are careful to aſk, with all the Duty and Reverence of Children, greater Encouragement cannot poſſibly be imagined, than the giving us leave to put him in mind what he is to us. And this we are not only permitted, but commanded to do, by Him, who taught us to begin our Prayers, with that moſt endearing of all Titles, *Our Father which art in Heaven.*

So again, when our Lord would moderate that anxious and inordinate Concern, which Mens Minds are ſo apt to be perplexed and tortured with, about the Neceſſaries of the preſent Life; he does it with this Reflection, that *our Heavenly Father knoweth* Matth vi. 32. *we have need of all theſe things.* Implying, that it can never conſiſt with the Character of a Father, to leave us deſtitute of thoſe Supplies, which it is always in His Power to furniſh, and out of Our Power to ſubſiſt without. And the miſtake of thoſe, who are apt to think themſelves neglected upon theſe Occaſions, is *Firſt*, that they make wrong Judgments of their own Condition, in ſuppoſing themſelves to want, what really they do not: And then, that they ſtretch thoſe Promiſes, which are our Security againſt the Neceſſities of Nature, to ſo many Engagements, for Convenience, and Eaſe, and Abundance. And once again we ſhould know, that even with reſpect to Neceſſaries, it makes no difference whether we be ſupplied from our own, or from other, Hands; Whether by our Subſtance, or our Labour, or by the Liberality of thoſe Friends, whom God raiſes up for us, in our Diſability and Diſtreſs. For both theſe are the Lord's doings; and He, who hath obliged himſelf to furniſh us, hath left himſelf at liberty, to chuſe what particular Methods he will furniſh us by. But after all, the moſt effectual way of ſilencing all Diſtruſts or Murmurings of this kind, is, to conſider, that this is a Spiritual Relation. Conſequently, that the Comforts riſing from it, tho' they extend to Wants of every kind, are chiefly ſuch, as meet with our Spiritual Wants. Conſtant and ſeaſonable

ſonable Recruits of inward Strength and Grace, the Bread of Life, and Wine of elect Souls, the Myſtical Banquets of the Body and Blood of Chriſt, and all the Supports and Refreſhments, requiſite to nouriſh us up unto Life eternal; Theſe are the Suſtenance agreeable to ſuch a Father. And in Theſe, we may reſt aſſured, he will never be wanting to his Children. Not only ſo; But when his Table has fed us, and we are grown up, by the Bounty of it, to the *fulneſs of the ſtature of perfect Men in Chriſt Jeſus*; he hath laid up for us a plentiful Portion, and, like a truly provident Father, taken effectual care for our future Settlement. A Settlement, durable beyond time itſelf; and ample and noble as his own immortal Happineſs. For This is the Sum of all our Privileges, This the Crown of all our Obedience and all our Expectations, that, *if we be Sons*, then *are we Heirs too*, even Heirs *of God through Chriſt*. Of which, as I propoſed in the beginning of this Diſcourſe, (by His good leave and aſſiſtance) hereafter.

The GOSPEL.

PARAPHRASE.

St. Matth. i. 18.

18. The Manner of Jeſus being born of *Mary*, though not of *Joſeph*, who is therefore only called her Huſband, not his Father, (*Ver.* 16.) was indeed extraordinary and full of wonder. For thus it fell out: His Mother was the eſpouſed Wife of *Joſeph*; but, before any knowledge of her Bed, ſhe was diſcovered to be with Child: And ſhe was ſo, by the Operation of the Holy Ghoſt.

18. *THE birth of Jeſus Chriſt was on this wiſe: When as his mother Mary was eſpouſed to Joſeph, before they came together, ſhe was found with Child of the Holy Ghoſt.*

19. This Diſcovery coſt *Joſeph* much Perplexity. The Law in theſe Caſes was very ſevere; and he, loth to carry things to an Extremity,

19. *Then Joſeph her Huſband being a juſt man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.*

mity, was desirous to save her both from Shame and Suffering, by a private Separation.

20. *But while he thought on these things, behold, the Angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.*

20. But these Troubles were soon composed by an Angel, sent to reveal the whole Secret, and to assure him, that all this was no Stain, either upon his Wife's Honour, or His; that here was no Injury done him, but all was entirely the Work of the Holy Spirit of God.

21. *And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his name* Jesus: *for he shall save his people from their sins.*

21. Foretelling at the same time, that this Child should be a Son, and directing him to be called *Jesus*, a Name importing that Salvation from Sin, which all, who believe and obey him, shall receive by his Means.

22. *Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the Prophet, saying,*

22. Thus it pleased God to fulfil a most remarkable Prophecy, given by *Isaiah* to the House of *David*, as a Sign, that they should not be extinguished by the Calamities they then lay under the Dread of.

23. *Behold a Virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call his Name Emmanuel; which, being interpreted, is God with us.*

23. That a pure Virgin should bring a Son, so remarkable a Blessing, so divine a Person, that all Men should perceive the extraordinary Favour and Presence of God in him.

24. *Then Joseph being raised from Sleep, did as the Angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his Wife:*

24. This gave *Joseph*, who had otherwise most reason to be scrupulous, such entire Satisfaction, that (though before he durst not) now he dwelt with his Wife, in Obedience to the Command of the Angel, and in full Persuasion of her Virtue.

25. *And knew her not, till she had brought forth her first-born Son. And he called his Name Jesus.*

25. Yet so, as never to take any conjugal Liberties with her, till after the Birth of this her first-born Son: Who, as had been likewise directed, had that significant Name of *Jesus* given him.

COM-

COMMENT.

THE Epiſtle for this Day hath told us, that, *when the Fulneſs of Time was come, God ſent forth his Son made of a Woman:* The Goſpel proceeds in explaining that work of Wonder, and acquaints us particularly with the uncommon manner of his being ſo made. As therefore our Meditations, on the Day of his Nativity, were fixed upon the Glories of his Divine, ſo thoſe of this Day more properly confine themſelves to the Reality of his Human, Nature. Thoſe ſhewed us *God of the Subſtance of his Father, begotten before the Worlds*, Theſe ſhew us *Man of the Subſtance of his Mother, born in the World.* But both together give us a juſt Idea of that *One Chriſt, who is God and Man, perfect God and perfect Man, of a reaſonable Soul and human Fleſh ſubſiſting.*

It is not without excellent good Reaſon, that the Perſon made choice of here, to be firſt ſatisfied in this extraordinary Conception, ſhould be *Joſeph*; One, whoſe Relation to the Holy Mother, as it made him moſt concerned to have Satisfaction given him of her Virtue; ſo would it naturally render him cautious of being impoſed upon in the Matter. Accordingly we find, by what Steps he came up to this Perſuaſion, from whence his Scruples roſe, what Uneaſineſs they produced, and by what Methods they were quieted. It was a cuſtomary thing with the *Jews*, for a conſiderable time to intervene, between the Eſpouſals or Solemn Contract, and the Parties cohabiting, in all Points, as Man and Wife. During this Interval, 'tis plain, it was, that *Joſeph*'s frequent Converſation with his beloved Spouſe gave him Opportunities of diſcovering her to be with Child. And yet this was ſo ordered, that They, who knew nothing of the Myſterious manner of it, might reaſonably enough ſuppoſe Him the Father

of

of that Child; and ſo there was provided a ſufficient protection for his Wife's Honour, againſt the Suſpicions and Scandal of the World. With Child he found ſhe was, by his own Obſervation, and apparent Signs of the thing. Which will ſeem leſs ſtrange, if we compare the 26th, and 27th, with the 56th Verſe of St. *Luke*'s firſt Chapter. Theſe place at leaſt three Months between their Eſpouſals, and *Mary*'s return to her own Houſe, from a Viſit made to her Couſin *Elizabeth*. With Child by himſelf he knew ſhe was not; With an Adultereſs he knew it both a Shame and a Sin to live; To expoſe her Life and Reputation upon this account he was loth; And, in the midſt of theſe diſtracting Thoughts, he is let into the whole Secret, and ſet perfectly at eaſe, by the Method, related at large in this portion of Scripture.

The Subſtance and Deſign then of this Paſſage, you eaſily perceive, extends to the ſeveral parts of our Lord's Incarnation; conſidered with regard, *Firſt*, To the Agent or Perſon effecting it. *Secondly*, To the Perſon paſſive in it, or Her, upon whom this miraculous Operation took place. And *Thirdly*, to an ancient and very remarkable Prophecy, of which this Miracle was the proper and intended accompliſhment. Of the Laſt of theſe I ſhall have a fit Occaſion to diſcourſe at large hereafter, and ſhall therefore chuſe at preſent to confine my Thoughts to the Two former.

For the Epiſtle of Annunciation.

Firſt then, For a convenient underſtanding ſo much of our Lord's Incarnation as falls within our compaſs, it is neceſſary to obſerve the Agent, or Perſon effecting this wonderful Conception. *She was found with Child of the Holy Ghoſt*, ſays St. *Matthew*. And accordingly the Angel, in St. *Luke*, reſolves that queſtion of the aſtoniſhed Virgin, *How ſhall this be, ſeeing I know not a man?* by the following reply, *The Holy Ghoſt ſhall come upon thee; and the Power of the Higheſt ſhall overſhadow*

Ver. 18.

Luke i. 35.

overſhadow thee, therefore alſo that holy Thing which ſhall be born of thee ſhall be called the Son of God. In theſe Words, agreeable to the uſual Modeſty, and great Decency, of Scripture-language, is implied all that action of the Holy Ghoſt, whereby the Virgin was enabled to become fruitful, and the place of ordinary Generation was in this caſe ſupply'd. For, that there was no Concurrence of any ſuch Caſe, not only She herſelf, in St. *Luke*, but the Angel, by whom She was viſited, teſtifies. He therefore, for ſtrengthening her belief of a Production ſo unexampled, ſo aſtoniſhing, declares it the Work of God, with whom She ought to remember, that *nothing is impoſſible.* To the ſame Point this Evangeliſt is clear. Not only, when relating her Pregnancy, as antecedent to *Joſeph*'s and Her coming together, which excludes her Huſband from any part in it: But much more, when applying to this Matter a Prophecy of *Iſaiah*, which yet could not be otherwiſe fulfilled, than by excluding every other Man, as well as her Huſband.

Luke i. 37.

Ver. 18.

Ver. 22, 23.

Now, when this action is in Scripture repreſented, as entirely the Work of God, and yet attributed to the Holy Ghoſt in particular: We are not to underſtand it ſo peculiarly His, that the Two other Perſons, ſubſiſting in the Godhead, ſhould have no Concern in it. For here that Rule of the Schools takes place, *that* the entire Union of the Divine Nature makes all ſuch Actions common to all Three, as do not refer to the Properties and Relations, by which they ſtand diſtinguiſhed from each other. *Jeſus* is therefore *the Son of God*, becauſe conceived by the Spirit of the Father. And the ſame Son of God, who raiſed his own Body from Death and the Grave, formed that ſame Body in the Virgin's Womb; All which notwithſtanding, this action is in more eſpecial manner aſſigned to the Holy Ghoſt, though common to the Father and the Son; becauſe Fructifying, and Sanctifying, are, in the Sacred Stile, generally attributed

attributed to his Influences. As therefore he began the firſt Creation, by *moving* (or brooding as it were) upon the Face of the Waters: So did he here begin the New Creation, by conveying a Principle and Power of Fruitfulneſs, into a Perſon otherwiſe incapable of it. And yet, as There, without the Father, and his Divine Word or Son, *not any thing was made that was made:* So did he Here bring this Second, this *Creation of a new thing* to effect, by the ſame Cooperation of the whole undivided Trinity, as he had done the Former.

Gen. i. 2.

Heb. i. 2. John i. 3.

Jer. xxxi. 22.

But although the Ends of an ordinary Generation were all anſwered by this Action; yet was it not, in all the Effects, agreeable to ſuch. For common Fathers beget Sons of their own Likeneſs and Subſtance; and herein it is, that the Paternal Relation is properly founded. Now this could not be done in the preſent Caſe, becauſe the Subſtance of the Holy Ghoſt is Eternal, Uncreated, Divine: But the Subſtance of Chriſt, conceived in, and born of, the Virgin, is Human, Created, and had a beginning in time. Therefore I ſaid, that the Spirit enabled the Virgin to bring forth: Therefore Chriſt cannot, with any Propriety, be called the Son of the Holy Ghoſt; nor, ſtrictly ſpeaking, the Son of God, with reference to this Birth. He is indeed the Son of God, as Man, becauſe (like *Adam*) an extraordinary Effect from a Divine Cauſe, working after an extraordinary manner. But, ſtrictly, and truly, he is the Son of God, by vertue of his Eternal Generation alone; becauſe, by this alone, he is *God, begotten of the Subſtance of his Father.* But a human Effect muſt have a human Cauſe. And, tho' the manner of Production was above Nature; Yet the Subſtance of Chriſt's Natural Body, to anſwer the end of his being born, muſt be made out of the Subſtance of ſome other natural Body. And what that was, we ſhall have occaſion to conſider by and by.

In the mean while that other Quality, obſerved juſt now to be more particularly attributed to the Holy Ghoſt, appears to have been concerned in this matter too; That I mean of Sanctifying, and rendering this Fruit of the Virgin, as the Angel moſt emphatically terms it, *That Holy thing, which ſhould be born of Her.* He, who came into the World to cleanſe others, could not perform this Office regularly, unleſs perfectly clean himſelf. But the Stain of our common Parent ſticks ſo cloſe to every natural Deſcendent of His, that the Human Nature cannot be ordinarily communicated without it. Hence grew an abſolute Neceſſity, that the Saviour and Sanctifier of the World, ſhould be conceived, in a method, beſide and above the uſual courſe of Nature. Now He, that ſprung from the immediate Operation of that Spirit, who is the Fountain of all Holineſs and Purity; and that Operation too, upon the Perſon of an undefiled and bleſſed Mother; He hath effectually provided againſt all the Difficulties of common Births; is altogether untainted with Luſt or Sin, and ſo the *Lamb of God, without blemiſh and without ſpot.*

Luke i. 35.

Secondly, That Chaſte and Holy Mother is next to be conſidered, as the Other Party concerned in this Miraculous Birth. And there are Three reſpects, in which we ſhall do well to conſider her. The *Firſt* regards her own Perſon. The *Second* her Relation to Chriſt. The *Laſt* her Virginity, notwithſtanding that Relation.

As to the *Firſt* of theſe, I cannot think it worth while to mention any particular ſignifications of the Name *Mary*, or the fanciful Collections ſome Zealots have made from thence. 'Tis no doubt, more material to our Purpoſe, to take notice, that She is deſcribed of the Houſe and Lineage of *David*, of the Tribe *Judah*, eſpouſed to a Deſcendent of the ſame Tribe and Family, and an Inhabitant of *Nazareth*. All this appears, not only from the

Luke i. 27.

the Genealogies in St. *Matthew* and St. *Luke*; but, by their going up together to *Bethlehem*, in Obedience to the *Roman* Emperor, who had commanded all the *Jews* to be *taxed* or enrolled, according to their reſpective Conditions, and at the Cities of the ſeveral Houſes, from whence they ſprung. Thus were thoſe Prophecies fulfilled, of the *Chriſt*, ſpringing from the Tribe of *Judah*, being the *Son of David*, and called a *Nazarene*. And, although the Scriptures ſeem chiefly careful, to give us the Pedigree of *Joſeph*, for whoſe Son, not only in vulgar, but legal Eſtimation, *Jeſus* was to paſs; yet, when the Author to the *Hebrews* affirms, as a matter evident beyond all Contradiction, that *our Lord ſprang out of Judah*; this is a warrant ſufficient, for concluding his Mother to have been of that Tribe. Becauſe, were She not ſo, he did not ſpring from thence, as will appear more fully by and by.

Matth. i. Luke iii. Luke ii. 3, 5.

Heb. vii. 15.

The next thing then concerning her, is the Relation ſhe bore to *Jeſus*. *His Mother Mary*. And this She was, in the moſt ſtrict and literal Senſe. She is ſaid to have *conceived him in her Womb*, She nouriſhed this Burthen; A neceſſary Conſequence of her *being great with Child*: She bore him about in her Body the uſual time of Mothers; for, while at *Bethlehem*, in order to be taxed, *the days were accompliſhed that ſhe ſhould be delivered*. Which Phraſe imports not any term of time, appointed for Her in particular, different from the reſt of her Sex in like caſes; but that Seaſon, called elſewhere the *Time of Life, and the full time being come*. And then, and not before, it was, that *She brought forth her firſt-born Son*, which is the laſt and finiſhing Circumſtance, neceſſary to make good the Title of *Mother*.

Matth. i. 18.

Luke i. 31. ii. 5.

Luke ii. 6.

Gen. xviii. 10. Luke i. 57. ii. 7. Matth. i. 25.

He then, who was conceived in *Mary*'s Womb, who grew there in proportion to other Children, who ſtay'd there the full time of other Births, who was nouriſhed during that time, as others are, till ripe for the Birth; who, at the end of that time, was born after the manner of common Infants: He was as truly and properly Her Son, as any other is the Son of Her, who bore him. And *Mary*, in regard of Him, was as properly a Mother, as any other Woman is, or can be, of any Child whatſoever, in the ordinary way of Generation.

May we not ſay indeed, that She was more properly and ſtrictly a Mother, than any common Mother is or can be? For, whereas in the uſual courſe of Nature, Children partake in the Subſtance of both Parents, the Whole of Chriſt's human Subſtance was derived from Her alone. It having been ſufficiently proved already, that neither *Joſeph*, nor any Man whatſoever, contributed the leaſt to this Production; and conſequently, that it was not *of the Will of the Fleſh, nor of the Will of Man, but of God.*

But how of God? As an Efficient Cauſe *by which*, not as a material Cauſe *out of which*, this Subſtance was made. The ſame Almighty Power, that formed the firſt Woman out of Man alone, did upon this occaſion form a Man, out of a Woman alone. And therefore that Prophecy, applied by the Author to the *Hebrews* to this purpoſe, expreſſes the thing with great exactneſs, *A body haſt thou prepared*, the Original is rather *faſhioned, fitted up* for me. But, though the formation was God's, the matter, of which he formed it, was *Mary*'s. So that, as we truly confeſs Chriſt to be *God of the Subſtance of the Father, begotten before the Worlds*, it is with equal Truth, that we believe him *Man of the Subſtance of his Mother, born in the World.*

Σῶμα κατηρτίσω μοι. Heb. x. 5.

He

He must have been so, to make good the ancient Predictions concerning him. The Promise to *Abraham* ran, that *In his Seed all the Nations of the Earth should be blessed*; and the Seed there meant, St. *Paul* says expressly, *was Christ*. He was promised to *David*, as one to come out of his Loins; so that *the Son of David* was a title, in use to signify the *Messiah*. This is the *Root of Jesse*, and the *Righteous Branch*: But how? except he came of their Posterity, grew out from that Tree, and were essentially united to the Stock? He then, who was not so, in respect of *Joseph* or any other Man, from whom he received nothing: Nor in respect of the Holy Ghost, from whom he received only the Form; must have been so in respect of his Mother *Mary*: And so of Her, because, of Her proper and actual Substance, he received the Materials of his human Nature.

Gen. xxii. 18. Galat. iii. 16. Psal. cxxxii. 12. xxii. 31. Matth. xxi. 9. Luke i. 32. Isa. xi. 1. Zech. vi. 12.

Therefore the Scriptures, with great Significance, call him *the Seed of a Woman*, *the Son of God made of a Woman*, and the like. None of which Titles could be proper, or so much as true, had the Virgin contributed nothing more upon this Occasion, than the carrying this Burthen, and bringing into the World a Body, miraculously framed, and conveyed into her, for that purpose: But that, which we are taught to believe of the matter, is this; That Christ's Human Nature was entirely taken from his Mother; That, by a wonderful Efficacy of Almighty Power, his Body was formed, not only in her, but of her; That thus he truly became, what otherwise he could not have been, the Seed of *Abraham* and *David*, *according to the Flesh*. *Mary* was therefore, upon all Accounts, strictly and Literally his Mother; and, upon some Accounts, more strictly so, than any other Woman ever was the Mother of any other Child.

Gen. iii. 15. Gal. iv. 4.

Matth. i. 1. Rom. i. 3.

Thirdly, The *Laſt* thing which calls for Our Obſervation under this Head, is the pure inviolate Virginity of this Mother. A truth clear, as from ſundry poſitive Texts, ſo particularly from the Paſſage now before us, and thoſe already alledged, in this Diſcourſe upon it. For, if not only *Joſeph*, but all Mankind, are excluded from any part in this ſupernatural Production; then the Conception of *Jeſus* did not alter the Purity of her State. And thus far Scripture carries us expreſly, *Verſe* 25.

Now this is a Circumſtance, the more important, by reaſon the truth of God was concerned in it; and, that it had been long before delivered, as one of the diſtinguiſhing Characters of the *Meſſiah*. To this Purpoſe, not Chriſtians only, but ſome Ancient *Jews* have applied that of *Jeremiah*, *The Lord hath created a new thing in the Earth, a Woman ſhall compaſs a Man*. The Words, in Propriety of Speech, ſuit well with This Conſtruction, and none of Theirs, who would evade it, anſwer at all to the Solemnity of that Preface, to the Genius of the Prophetick Stile, or to the Strangeneſs of any Event, deſerving to be termed *The Lord's creating a new thing upon the Earth*. But that of *Iſaiah* is yet more full and particular, and this, the Holy Ghoſt himſelf aſſures us, was actually fulfilled in the Birth of our *Jeſus*. So that, if we are content to accept the Spirit of God for a good Interpreter of Prophecies dictated by himſelf, here can remain no reaſonable Doubt. For in this caſe, we are not left to the Applications of mere Men; But the ſame Holy Ghoſt, who predicted ſo wonderful an Event by the Prophet, hath by the Evangeliſt pointed out that Event, explained his own Meaning, and determined the Prediction to our Hand.

Jer. xxxi. 22.

Iſa. vii. 14.

Ver. 22, 23.

Thus a chaſte Virgin became a Mother. Thus was our *Jeſus a Holy Thing* throughout. A High-prieſt, every way qualified for his Office; as being, from the very Womb,

Womb, *harmleſs, undefiled, and ſeparate from Sinners: Who, when he offered for the Sins of the People, had no need to offer firſt for his own.* Heb. vii. 26, 27. And, upon that Account, we may depend upon the Power of that Sacrifice, to expiate effectually the Sins of Others.

Thus have we, under the Conduct of Scripture, taken ſuch a view, as we may, of the Son of God *coming down from Heaven, Incarnate by the Holy Ghoſt of the Virgin Mary, and made Man for us Men and for our Salvation.* And, how aſtoniſhing, or remote ſoever from the ordinary Courſe of Nature, this Doctrine may ſeem; it is yet no more, than every Chriſtian profeſſes to believe, when repeating thoſe Words daily in the Apoſtles Creed, *Who was conceived by the Holy Ghoſt, born of the Virgin Mary.* An Argument, ſo fruitful in pious and ſeaſonable Reflections, that it would aſk many Diſcourſes to mention, but no Number can ever exhauſt them. I will therefore conclude with adding ſome few more, to thoſe, which have already been offered upon the like Occaſion.

How glorioufly the Power, the Wiſdom, the Juſtice, the Goodneſs, of Almighty God manifeſted themſelves in the Incarnation of the Bleſſed Son; What lively Faith, what fervent Love, what extenſive Charity, what profound Humility, the Contemplation of this Myſtery ought to produce in us, hath been my Endeavour to make my Reader ſenſible of Formerly. Think me not inconſiſtent with myſelf, if from the very ſame Myſtery I make it now my *Epiſtle and Goſpel for* Chriſtmas-Day.

1. *Firſt* Endeavour earneſtly to recommend ſuch a true Greatneſs of Soul as may incline every Chriſtian, to value himſelf upon this Occaſion, much above the rate, that the generality of Men are wont to do. The Sin of Pride St. *Paul* hath well deſcribed, *by thinking of ourſelves more highly than we ought to think.* Rom. xii. 3. But yet I make no Difficulty to affirm,

That the not thinking of ourſelves ſo highly as we ought to think, is one of the worſt and moſt deſtructive Evils, we can poſſibly be guilty of. And, as high Thoughts may be qualified, and employed, and improved, it is not eaſy to exceed in them. For there is in all Sin a Meanneſs of Spirit, and a Diſparagement to our Nature: Which did we but rightly attend to, it were ſcarce poſſible we ſhould ſubmit to, much leſs delight in, thoſe Diſpoſitions and Habits, which are the fouleſt Blemiſh, the vileſt Debaſement and Reproach, that can any manner of way come upon us. Hence is that wiſe and uſeful Advice of ſome Old Philoſophers, that Men would reſpect themſelves, pay all due Honour to the God within them, and not proſtitute and enſlave a noble Principle of Reaſon, ſo nearly allied to the Divine Spirit above, by the Filthy Affections of Brutes. But, if Our being made in the Likeneſs of God were a good Argument to this Purpoſe; how much more perſuaſive ought that to be, of God's being made in the Likeneſs of Man? That is the Ground of a much nearer and more endearing Relation, than ever our Nature could boaſt of before. And, Shall we diſhonour ſuch a Body and Soul, as the Son of God made one with his own Divine Perſon, by abandoning them to thoſe very Works of the Devil, which *He was manifeſted in the Fleſh*, on purpoſe *to deſtroy?* To ſink That down to the Level of Brutes, which was made but a little lower than the Angels, is an Affront to His diſtinguiſhing Bounty, which gave us ſo honourable a Station, in the Order of his Creatures. But how unpardonable, how monſtrous an Indignity is it to him, who hath in ſome ſort made us higher than the Angels, by condeſcending to aſſume Our Nature rather than Theirs; when we wallow in that Mire and Filthineſs, which even the Obſceneſt of Brutes are deteſted, and deſpiſed, for indulging? When therefore we reflect upon the Honour God hath done us, let us, at the ſame time, not forget the Honour, upon this very

1 John iii. 8.

very Account due to ourſelves. Let us join our Endeavours to exalt the Nature he bore; Let us cheriſh a noble and generous Diſdain of all manner of Vice, as that which both is, and makes us, deſpicable. Let us think it our Duty, from our Lord's Humility, to raiſe our Minds up to that commendable Ambition, of partaking in the Divine Excellencies of Innocence, and Goodneſs, and Charity; becauſe he partook of our Frailties and Sufferings, and dwelt in the Similitude of ſinful Fleſh.

Eſpecially let us remember, what Care the Scripture takes, to obſerve, that, in the midſt of all that Likeneſs, there was one Difference conſtantly preſerved. For He, that in *all Points was like unto us*, never was, never could, be like us in One Point. Mortal indeed, and tempted too as we are, but *ſtill without Sin.* And therefore He, whoſe Weakneſs and Trials are our Security for Compaſſion and Succour, when we are tempted; hath never ſet us any Pattern for yielding to, much leſs for making, and courting, Temptations.

2. *Secondly*, As our Lord's Incarnation ſhould excite our Zeal, to aſpire after all Virtue in general; ſo may it more particularly raiſe our Eſteem of Chaſtity and Purity, Indulging *the Luſts of Concupiſcence* is, by St. *Paul*, made a Mark of *Men that know not God.* But ſure they muſt be errand Strangers to Chriſt, and the glorious Myſtery we have now been treating of, who think his Diſciples capable of any Blemiſh, more contrary, more diſgraceful, to their Profeſſion than the abandoning themſelves to any ſort of Uncleanneſs. *When he took upon him to deliver Man, he did not abhor the Virgin's Womb*; But ſtill it was the Virgin's. And that Birth is ſo far acted over again, in the Perſon of every Chriſtian; that, as There the only Holy Ghoſt then vouchſafed to exert his prolifick Power; ſo neither now will he endure to dwell with, or ſhed his ſanctifying Graces upon any Soul proſtituted to filthy Deſires. If therefore we would invite this

1 Theſſ. iv. 5.

Bleſſed

Bleſſed Gueſt to viſit, to take up his Reſidence, to ſet up his Throne in our Hearts; we muſt firſt purge thoſe Hearts, and fit up an Apartment, agreeable to the Cleanneſs of the Inhabitant we hope for. So abſolutely inconſiſtent is Impurity of Converſation, with a State of Grace, or the Character of a Chriſtian. So deceitful and empty, ſo dangerous and deluding, are the moſt pompous Appearances of Piety and Devotion, or the moſt boaſted Pretenſions to the Spirit; while Men allow themſelves the Liberties, and obey the Affections, and practiſe and delight in the Works, of the Fleſh.

3. Once more. We can hardly, I ſhould think, meditate on the manner of our Lord's Incarnation, with any Degree of Seriouſneſs; and not feel ourſelves very ſtrongly inclined, to bewail our Unhappineſs of Original Sin. That Stain and Guilt are a neceſſary part of the wretched Inheritance, entail'd upon all *Adam*'s Poſterity. And, however ſome juſtly valued Privileges may diſpoſe us to entertain lofty Conceits of ourſelves, yet this ſingle Reflection, methinks, ſhould more than ſuffice to mortify our Vanity, that we are born the Children of Corruption and Wrath. Highly expedient therefore it is, to apply this Antidote frequently, againſt that Pride, which, above all others, ſeems to be the reigning Vice of every Mind. A Vice, diſſembled pretty well in many, but really ſubdued in very few. The Firſt, that puts forth in Infancy; the Laſt, that forſakes us, thro' the whole Courſe of our Lives. And, among many Others, is not This Matter for much Humiliation, that, as valuable Creatures as we fancy ourſelves, yet it could not conſiſt with the Dignity of the Son of God, to be created, as We are? That He, who ſubmitted to our Infirmities and Sufferings, would not endure the leaſt Tincture of our Defilement; And, tho' he choſe to die, like the vileſt of Men, yet he abſolutely refuſed to be conceived and born, like the very beſt of them? How wide a difference is there, betwixt his

his Thoughts and Ours on this Occaſion? The Afflictions, the Sorrows, the Pains, and the Neceſſity of Dying, which we are apt to look upon as our greateſt Miſeries, are not, it ſeems, comparable to that, of which we think ſo ſeldom, and ſo ſlightly, that we *were ſhapen in Wickedneſs, and in Sin our Mothers conceived us*; That we bring into the World that Root of Bitterneſs, from which our after-Faults, and all our Misfortunes, ſpring.

This, I ſay, is Matter of Humiliation and Sorrow; But, bleſſed be God, it is not however Matter of Deſpair. For *he hath opened a Fountain for Sin and for Uncleanneſs*. The Waters of Baptiſm waſh our ſullied Souls, and preſent us clean and white before God. Theſe turn our *Scarlet into Snow*, and make our *Crimſon Wool*. And tho' the unhappy Tendencies to evil remain, and daily Inconveniencies ariſe from them; Yet we are, or may be, *daily renewed by the Graces of his Holy Spirit, who was born without Sin to cleanſe us from all Sin*. The ſame ſanctifying Power, which came upon the Virgin, will not diſdain to deſcend upon us too, if we imitate Her Meekneſs and Modeſty, her lively Faith and blameleſs Purity. The ſame Principle of Fruitfulneſs, which enabled her to become a Mother, will Help Us to bring forth abundantly, to conceive and bear Chriſt in our Hearts, by becoming *fruitful in every good Word and Work*. 'Tis from this Spirit alone, that we are qualified to do ſo. But, as that Bleſſing upon Her was a Conſequence of her believing and conſenting: ſo our vigorous Faith, and diligent Concurrence with this Spirit, Our ſubmitting to be acted upon, and influenced, by his Graces, are required, as neceſſary Conditions to our Sanctification. Let us then put ourſelves entirely under his Holy Guidance. Let us conſider this Miracle, wrought for our Redemption, as a powerful Motive to Innocency and Virtue. And to our conſtant Endeavours, let us daily (let us at this

happy

happy Seaſon eſpecially) add our moſt fervent Prayers, that *By the Myſtery of his Holy Incarnation, and by his Holy Nativity, our Good Lord would deliver us.* And to theſe Prayers may he pleaſe to ſay, *Amen.*

The CIRCUMCISION *of* CHRIST.

The COLLECT.

ALmighty God, who madeſt thy bleſſed * Son to be Circumciſed and Obedient to the Law for Man; Grant us the true Circumciſion of the † Spirit, that our Hearts and all our Members being mortified from all worldly and carnal Luſts, we may in all things obey thy bleſſed Will, through the ſame thy Son Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. *Amen.*

* Luke ii. 21. Galat. iv. 4.

† Rom. ii. 29. Coloſſ. ii. 11. iii. 5.

The EPISTLE.

Rom. iv. 8.

PARAPHRASE.

8. *David*, even while the Law was in full force, deſcribes the Bleſſedneſs of the Good Man, not by having no Sin, and paying a perfect Obedience, but by having his Debt releaſed by the Mercy of his Creditor, and the Sins he had committed not being charged to his Account.

8. *BLeſſed is the man, to whom the Lord will not impute Sin.*

9. Let us ſee then, What ſort of Perſons are qualified for this Bleſſedneſs: Whether ſuch alone, are the Circumciſed, and ſo live under the Law; or whether others beſides them. And for a Reſolution of this enquiry, the Caſe of *Abraham* will be of great uſe to us.

9. *Cometh this Bleſſedneſs then upon the Circumciſion only, or upon the Uncircumciſion alſo? For we ſay, that Faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteouſneſs.*

10. Now the Scripture is expreſs, that *Abraham* was

10. *How was it then reckoned? when he was in Circumciſion, or in Uncircumciſion? not in Circumciſion, but in Uncircumciſion.*

eſteemed

eſteemed Righteous in the ſight of God, upon the account, and at the time, of his believing the promiſe of God made to him. But this, it is plain, was before *Abraham* was Circumciſed.

11. *And he received the ſign of Circumciſion, a ſeal of the righteouſneſs of faith, which he had yet being uncircumciſed: that he might be the Father of all them that believe, though they be not circumciſed, that righteouſneſs might be imputed to them alſo;*

12. *And the Father of circumciſion, to them who are not of the circumciſion only, but who alſo walk in the ſteps of that Faith of our Father Abraham, which he had, being yet uncircumciſed.*

11, 12. You will ſay perhaps, that, upon theſe Terms, Circumciſion was a needleſs and an uſeleſs Impoſition. Not ſo neither. It had its Uſes, particularly theſe two. 1. It was a ſign of the Faith and Obedience, which was the Righteouſneſs on *Abraham*'s part figured by it. 2. It was a viſible teſtimony and aſſurance of *Abraham*'s being in Covenant with God. A Covenant grounded, not in this rite; but in God's acceptance of that Faith, which was antecedent to this rite. And thus *Abraham* was qualified to be the Father (the common pattern) of all the faithful. Of the Gentiles, or thoſe who were never circumciſed, as He had not been himſelf, when accepted for his Faith; And of the *Jews*, who are his Children, not by vertue of the mere ſign, but by imitation of that Faith and Obedience, ſignified by it.

13. *For the promiſe that he ſhould be the Heir of the World, was not to Abraham, or to his ſeed through the Law, but through the righteouſneſs of Faith.*

13. The Law then, which was not yet in being, could not be the foundation of God's promiſe to *Abraham*, that he ſhould be the common Father of all the bleſſed Faithful, the Heir of thoſe Privileges and Bliſſes, which He and They after him ſhould inherit. But that Faith which was accepted and reckoned to him for Righteouſneſs, at the time that promiſe was made; This is the true ground, upon which He then did, and all thoſe of whom he is the reputed Father, muſt, expect the Benefits, contained, and implied, in that Promiſe.

14. *For if they which are of the Law be Heirs, Faith is made void, and the Promiſe made of none effect.*

14. It muſt be ſo. For if we ſuppoſe none to partake of this Inheritance, but ſuch only as live under, and acquire a Title to it by, the Law; The conſequence will be, 1. That *Abraham*'s Faith, (and in proportion

portion that of his Spiritual Deſcendents) is of no ſignificance at all in this Matter: Which yet the Scripture poſitively declares to have been *counted to him for Righteouſneſs*. And, 2. That God hath not been ſo good as his Word. For the Promiſe was, that he ſhould be a Father of many Nations, his Seed as the Stars of Heaven, and that all Families of the Earth ſhould be bleſſed in him. Whereas the Law was given but to one Family, not to the whole of his Poſterity, even after the Fleſh; and ſo but one Nation is bleſſed in Him, if all who, like him, believe without the Law, are, notwithſtanding that belief, excluded.

COMMENT.

ST. *Paul*'s Intention, in this firſt part of his Epiſtle, is to confute thoſe Doctrines; which gave great Diſturbance to the firſt Chriſtians, by urging the neceſſity of ſtill adhering to the *Jewiſh* Law, of depending upon that for Juſtification and Eternal Life, and conſequently excluding the *Gentile* World, from any Right to, or Part in, theſe Benefits. In order hereunto he hath proved, from the Authority of their own Scriptures, that *Jews*, as well as *Gentiles*, were all under Sin: Therefore, that their Law, and the Works of it, were not ſufficient to ſave them; Therefore there muſt be ſome other more powerful Expedient: which he inſiſts is Faith: Such as Men might be capable of, notwithſtanding they had been Sinners. He proceeds to ſhew, that this is ſo far from a novel Conceit, as even to have been the Condition of their great Anceſtor's Happineſs: That *Abraham* himſelf, once an Idolater, was eſteemed Righteous in Vertue of This, and not for the Merit of his own Doings, or the unſpotted Innocence of his Life: That the Wiſeſt and Beſt Men under the Law, as well as He before it, owed their Happineſs to the Mercy of a God remitting their Sins: Conſequently that the Law, if neceſſary, could only be ſo, as an indiſpenſable Qualification for ſuch forgiving Mercy; not

Chap. iii. 9, &c.

Ver. 24, &c.

Chap. iv. 3.

Ver. 6, &c.

not as it put any into a State, ſtanding in no need of Mercy.

The next thing then to be examined, was, whether God had determined to extend his favour to none, who were not thus qualified. And to reſolve this, he appeals to the Manner of his proceeding with *Abraham*. Whoſe Faith, being counted for Righteouſneſs, before his Circumciſion, makes it evident, that the Legal Rites, of which this was the Initiating and the Chief, are not abſolutely neceſſary. This follows from His Caſe, conſidered as a private Perſon. But take him as the common Father of the Faithful, and then it will follow, that every Heir of the ſame Promiſe muſt attain it, by the ſame Method. And therefore Faith, which *Abraham* had, muſt be, and the Works of the Law, which he had not, could not be, the Condition, of Men having *Righteouſneſs reckoned to them*. Now *Righteouſneſs*, in this caſe, is but another Word for Pardon of their Sins, and Salvation of their Souls.

This is in Subſtance the Apoſtle's Argument. The Latter part whereof concerning *Abraham*, is very pertinently ſet before us, on the Day, when that *Promiſed Seed of his, in whom all the Nations of the Earth are bleſſed*, ſubmitted to be Circumciſed, and ſo made *under the Law, that he might redeem them that were under the Law*. Of which wiſe and gracious Condeſcenſion, that we may have the clearer Underſtanding, and learn our own Privilege and Duty conſequent thereupon: Three Things there are, fit for us to conſider.

I. *Firſt*, The Nature and Reaſons of the Ordinance itſelf.

II. *Secondly*, What it repreſented, as neceſſary, not only to the Perſons obliged to it formerly; but even to Us, who have the Happineſs of being exempted from it. And

III. *Thirdly*, The Reaſons, that made it convenient for Chriſt to ſubmit to it.

The

The Two Former ſhall make the Subject of my preſent Diſcourſe. The Laſt will be more properly reſerved for the Goſpel appointed us upon this Feſtival; and All together, improved as they ought to be, will be the beſt Celebration of it, that we are capable of.

I. *Firſt* then, we will enquire briefly into the Nature and Reaſons of this Ordinance itſelf. What the Original of it was, as to *Abraham* and his Poſterity, the firſt Morning Leſſon gives a large and very particular Account. As alſo, upon what Perſons, at what time, and upon what part of the Body, it was to be performed: The neceſſity and benefit of punctually obſerving, the great Danger and Puniſhment of refuſing, or neglecting it. And therefore, waving any needleſs enlargement upon Particulars ſo very well known, I chuſe rather to apply myſelf directly to thoſe Reaſons, for which principally it ſeems to have been inſtituted at firſt, and enjoined ſo ſtrictly to that Race, for ſo many ſucceeding Generations.

Gen. xvii.

1. One of theſe, we have little Cauſe to doubt, was, That it might ſtand for a mark of Diſtinction, between the Deſcendents of this Stock, and the reſt of Mankind, And this is ſo conſiderable, that St. *Chryſoſtome*, and others, inſiſt upon it, as the main ground of its being impoſed upon them. To which purpoſe we may take notice, that the Hiſtory informs us, of *Abraham* being, ſome time before this Command, called away from his Country and Kindred, who were, like the reſt of their Neighbours, Idolaters: That, in Obedience to that Call, he made no delay to ſeparate himſelf, not from their Perſons, and Converſation, and Dwelling only, but from their Corrupt Manners, and falſe Worſhip too. Into which, to the Intent He and His might not at any time afterwards relapſe, it was thought a convenient prevention, and guard for their Virtue, in proceſs of time, to

Hom. in Gen. xxxix. 40. Maimonides More Nev. Gen xii.

Gen xxx. 4.

to forbid them promiſcuous Marriages, and (ſo far as their Circumſtances would allow) all manner of civil Commerce, with any of the Heathen People round about them. This may ſatisfy us, why *Circumciſion*, as our Saviour ſpeaks, ſhould have been *of the Fathers, and not of the Law:* becauſe God had, even then, begun to make ſuch a Separation, and ſelected to himſelf a peculiar People, ſome Hundreds of Years before the giving of the Law at Mount *Sinai*. This alſo may be a good reaſon for the Inferences, made by ſome Names of great Authority, upon what we read in the Book of *Joſhua:* That, during the *Iſraelites* Forty Years ſojourning in the Wilderneſs, there was an intermiſſion of this Rite, but, that it was immediately repeated again, upon their entrance in the Land of *Canaan*. The Perſons on whom it had paſſed in *Egypt*, were dead in that long Pilgrimage; and They, who were born in the mean while, had not yet undergone it. Not improbably, becauſe the ground of it thus far ceaſed, while they were by themſelves in a deſolate place. But, ſo ſoon as they returned into a Land inhabited, a Country Scandalous for all manner of abominable Wickedneſs, when the Danger of mingling with Men of different Perſuaſions, and of being ſeduced by ſuch mixture, returned, it was requiſite, this Note of Union among themſelves, and of diſtinction from Foreigners, ſhould return with it. In the Obſervance of which, this People were afterwards ſo exceedingly rigid, and tenacious, as to render it the Character of Civil, no leſs than Religious, Communion. The Privileges of Commerce and Friendſhip, and even freedom of Converſation, being uſually imparted to Aliens, as we find them to the *Sichemites* in particular, with an *Only in this will we conſent unto you, if ye will be, as we be, that every Male of you be Circumciſed.*

John v.

Joſh. v. Theodoret. Maſius. Spencer de Legib. Hebr.

Gen. xxxiv. 15.

2. *Secondly*, This alſo was a Note of Commemora-

tion, to put them that bore it continually in mind, whose Offspring they were, and what advantages they stood intitled to, provided they took care, not to degenerate from the Glories of that Stock, from whence they sprung. Now, considering that *Abraham* was the First we read of, whom Almighty God rescued from those general Corruptions in Faith and Manners, which the World had now a second time sunk into, by relapsing since the Flood; Considering, that this Person and his Issue were singled out for a Repository of Truth, a chosen Generation, a Receptacle for God upon Earth, and the Source of his Son after the Flesh; there was reason in abundance, why this Remembrance should be very grateful to them. And apt enough, 'tis plain, upon all occasions they were, to value themselves upon so particular an Honour. The rest of Mankind we find them holding at distance, and in great contempt, branding them with the reproachful Name of *the Uncircumcision*, making great boast of *Abraham*'s Seed, and much Account of the Covenant struck with Him. But the most useful part of this Reflection was too commonly overlook'd: The Eminent Faith, and ready Obedience of so renowned an Ancestor, and the noble Emulation of his Virtues, which such a Pattern ought to have inspired. 'Tis therefore, that a Behaviour, unworthy the Descendents of such a Father, is so often charged upon them; Therefore, that they are reproached with a vain presumption, of their Blood alone recommending them. *Think not*, says the Baptist, *to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our Father*, that is, *while yourselves* are no better than Serpents, and a *generation of Vipers*. And our Blessed Saviour, in like manner, *If ye were Abraham's Children, ye would do the Works of Abraham*. To the same effect it is, that St. *Paul* here insists that *Abraham*'s Faith moved God, to engage in such liberal Promises to Him, and his Posterity; That the Covenant was a Consequence of his

Matth. iii. 9.

John viii. 39.

his Piety, and Circumciſion a Confirmation of that Covenant; And, that the only relation to Him, which could ſtand any Man in ſtead, is not that of Conſanguinity and Natural Deſcent, but the Reſemblance of his Virtues, and claiming under him, as Father of the Faithful. Theſe are the things proper for Circumciſion to have ſuggeſted; And thus it was their Honour and Advantage; A Monument of Favour, which did ſet that Race above the World in common, and a powerful Incitement to thoſe Qualifications, which diſtinguiſhed, and capacitated Him for ſuch peculiar Grace.

3. Hence it is ſufficiently manifeſt, in the *Third* place, that Circumciſion was a ſign of inward Virtue, and intended to figure ſome particular Diſpoſitions of the Mind, which bore proportion to the outward Ceremony, and were required, for rendering it effectual. But, becauſe the ſhewing what Theſe are in particular, hath been already propounded for the Subject of my *Second* General Head; I ſhall reſerve them for that place, and proceed to conſider it,

4. *Fourthly*, Not only as a ſign, but a Seal too. For ſo St. *Paul* expreſly terms it here, *a Seal of the Righteouſneſs of Faith.* Now this is a Term, naturally referring us to mutual Contracts; and accordingly we find it, at the firſt Inſtitution, ſtiled *a Covenant*, and a *Token of the Covenant of God in their Fleſh.* My Endeavour therefore ſhall be to explain, in few Words, How fitly it was choſen for that purpoſe, What it ratified on God's part, and What it implied on Man's.

Ver. 11.

Gen. xvii. 10, 11, 13.

The Promiſes of God were to this effect: That he would bleſs *Abraham*, and his Seed after him, with numerous Increaſe and wonderful Succeſſes: That he would beſtow upon them the Land of *Canaan*, admit them into an everlaſting Covenant with himſelf: And that, *in his Seed all the Families of the Earth ſhould be bleſſed.* Now

Gen. Chap. xii, xv, xvii.

the commanding Circumcision as a Memorial of this Covenant, was the ſtrongeſt Confirmation imaginable of theſe Promiſes. For this was a Character, hardly to be ſuppoſed poſſible, to grow into uſe by Mens own choice, or for any other reaſon, but purely in obedience to an appointment of God; It did not only diſtinguiſh them from, but rendered them deſpicable in the Eyes of moſt other Nations and Profeſſions. And it was a Mark as indelible, as it was particular. Conſequently They, and all the World, muſt eaſily diſcern whether God were really as good as his Word, or not. For, by appointing all of that Race to uſe it for ſuch a purpoſe, there could be no confuſion in after-Ages; no diſpute who was, or was not, a *Child of Abraham*, an *Heir according to Promiſe*. This Ratification every Man carried about in his own Perſon; And They, who did not, were ſufficiently informed of it. Neither the thing, nor the occaſion of it, was a Secret; And conſequently, neither could the anſwering, or the diſappointing, thoſe Expectations raiſed by it, be any. So that this Progeny had the firmeſt grounds of Aſſurance. For no Man can have greater dependence upon Truth and Juſtice, than for the Party, with whom he deals, to give ſuch a Pledge of both, as muſt needs betray itſelf; by raiſing a Witneſs in Judgment againſt him, which cannot fail to publiſh his Falſhood to all the World, if he ſhould happen to be guilty of it.

Thus did it ſeal God's part; and the Counterpart on Man's was likewiſe teſtified by the ſame Expedient. For by this They engaged to be his People, to forſake Idolatry, and to worſhip and obey the true God Only. Of all which this was a very ſignificant indication, in oppoſition to thoſe obſcene Deities, and beſtial Rites, that made up a great part of the Pagan Religion. And to ſhew that the Signification of the Rite was not confined to the renouncing of falſe Gods, but extended to the whole of their Duty; it was uſed, and interpreted after-

afterwards, for the initiating Ceremony into the Obedience of the whole Levitical Inſtitution. Hence it is, that the Apoſtles complain of it, as a *Yoke, which neither they nor their Fathers were able to bear.* Acts xv. 10. Not that Circumciſion was, or could be ſuch, ſingly and by itſelf; but only upon the account of its Conſequences; The long train, and heavy burthen of Ceremonies it drew after it, and the rigour of that Sentence, which this one Act concluded them under, rendered it ſuch. Acts xv. 1, 24. Hence being *Circumciſed after the manner of Moſes*, and being *Circumciſed, and keeping the Law*, are uſed as Terms equivalent. Hence St. *Paul* argues againſt it ſo warmly, *Behold I Paul ſay unto you, that if ye be Circumciſed, Chriſt ſhall profit you nothing. For I teſtify again to every Man that is Circumciſed, that he is a Debtor to do the whole Law.* Gal. v. 2, 3.

Circumciſion then, to the *Jews* was plainly of the ſame importance in this reſpect, with Baptiſm now to Chriſtians. A Sacrament of Initiation to the Service of God, a Holy Engagement to believe and do, as He had revealed and commanded. The Subſtance of the thing engaged for, was then indeed ſometimes more, and ſometimes leſs; But thus much was common to all times, that it contracted for an Univerſal Compliance with, and Obedience to, whatever God had made obligatory to the Men of that preſent Time.

And the Token of this, in reſpect of Men, was highly convenient alſo. They could not evade it, they could not conceal it. The Remembrances of their Duty were always preſent, and their Law had ſo deep a Concern in it, that the very Life, and Soul, and Subſtance of *Judaiſm* ſeems to have conſiſted in Circumciſion. Without this they were Aliens and Strangers in right, though Children in Blood. The Perſon undergoing it, was for that Day called the *Spouſe*, to intimate his Marriage then to God. This made them *Iſraelites* in Privilege, and was contrived to make them *Iſraelites indeed.*

deed. Nor were the weighty Conſtructions put upon it, additional Inventions of Superſtitious Men: But God himſelf deſigned it for ſuch mutual Stipulations, and accordingly declared to *Abraham* at the very firſt appointment, *This is my Covenant which ye ſhall make between me and you, and thy Seed after thee.* And hence, I preſume, they argue very reaſonably, who have concluded this to be an Expedient, for removing the Guilt of original Sin then, in proportion to what Baptiſm doth now. The Part, on which this Rite is exerciſed, being probably thought to intimate thus much. But waving that, farther than this ſhort hint, it ſeems pretty plain from the reaſon of the thing. For the Nature of Covenants with God is, to put Men's future Fate, upon the Iſſue of their future Fidelity, in performing what they contract for. And therefore all former Quarrels muſt be taken up, all old Debts cancelled, before Men can be in a condition of indenting afreſh with him. A Covenant-State implies Favour, and Friendſhip, a good Underſtanding, and a clear Account; Such as forgives, and imputes no paſt Treſpaſſes; unleſs ſome ſubſequent Forfeiture caſt the Man back again, and, by repeated Acts of Enmity, raiſe up the otherwiſe forgotten Provocations, in Judgment againſt him.

Gen. xvii. 10.

Much more might be ſpoken concerning this *Firſt* Head. But I confine myſelf the rather, becauſe it explains an Ordinance ſo far from neceſſary now, that it is even unlawful and deſtructive. Yet ſomething there lies couched under it, which hath not yet loſt, nor ever can loſe, its Obligation. The Collect for this Day hath inſtructed us to pray for *the true Circumciſion of the Spirit*; and therefore my Subject is far from having Juſtice done it, till diligent attention hath been paid to my

II. *Second* Head. Which promiſed to conſider, what this Rite repreſented, as neceſſary, not only to the Perſons formerly uſing it, but to us alſo, who have the

happineſs of being exempted from the Carnal Ordinance itſelf, and all the Servile Conſequences of it.

That a great deal of this kind was always intended, and that Men at no time ought to have reſted in the External Act alone, is manifeſt beyond all Controverſy, from the Writings of the *Old Teſtament*. Hence it was, that *Moſes* commanded the *Iſraelites* to *Circumciſe the Foreſkin of their Heart, and be no more ſtiff-necked.* Deut. x. 16. In agreement whereunto St. *Stephen* calls the obſtinate *Jews uncircumciſed in Heart and Ears*; Acts. vii. 51. and adds the reaſon of his reproaching them in thoſe terms, *Ye do always reſiſt the Holy Ghoſt.* Hence it is predicted, as a Bleſſing of *Iſrael*'s beſt Days, *The Lord thy God will Circumciſe thy Heart, and the Heart of thy Seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and with all thy Soul.* Deut. xxx. 6. And though at the firſt Covenant with *Abraham*, the threatening ran thus, *The Uncircumciſed Man-child, whoſe Fleſh of his Foreſkin is not Circumciſed, that Soul ſhall be cut off from his People:* Gen. xvii. 14. Yet it ſeems removing the Fleſh alone was not Security ſufficient. For thus God expreſſes himſelf by *Jeremiah*, *Circumciſe yourſelves to the Lord, and take away the Foreſkin of your Heart, ye Men of Judah, and Inhabitants of Jeruſalem, leſt my Fury come forth like Fire, and burn that none can quench it, becauſe of your evil doings.* Jer. iv. 4. So certain it is, even from this People's own Teſtimonies, which St. *Paul* in this Epiſtle hath urged them with upon this Occaſion, that *He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that Circumciſion which is outward in the Fleſh: But he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and Circumciſion is that of the Heart, in the Spirit, and not in the Letter, whoſe Praiſe is not of Men but of God.* Rom. ii. 28, 29.

The Texts here alledged do plainly evince, that there is an inward Circumciſion required: That This is the moſt material, and moſt acceptable, the only effectual One. Not only ſo, but they in great meaſure

deſcribe it to us, and ſave us the Labour of ſeeking any farther, for a juſt Notion of the thing. For, from Theſe put together, it is eaſy to ſee the Subſtance of it compriſed, in the *Three* following Particulars.

1. The *Firſt* is a Readineſs, and willing Diſpoſition, to know the Will of God; and to ſubmit to it, when known. This I collect from that Exhortation of *Moſes*, *Circumciſe the Foreſkin of your Heart, and be no more ſtiff-necked*, joined with the Reproof of St. *Stephen*, who calls the Jews *uncircumciſed in Heart and Ears*, by reaſon of their inflexible Oppoſition, to the Doctrine of our Bleſſed Saviour and his Apoſtles.

Deut. x. 16.

Acts. vii. 51.

Now Candour and Ingenuity of Temper, giving our Teachers a patient Hearing, examining what they would perſuade us to fairly, without Partiality and Prepoſſeſſion, allowing every Argument its juſt Weight, yielding to the Convictions of Truth, ſo as to aſſent with our Underſtanding and Will, and to make what we underſtand and believe the conſtant Rule and Meaſure of our Practice; Theſe are Moral Duties, of eternal and indiſpenſable Obligation. All Profeſſions of Men, all Diſpenſations of Religion are, and muſt be, bound under them. Sincerity, and Modeſty, and Meekneſs, ever were, and ever will be, Virtues. Faction and Fierceneſs, Perverſeneſs and Obduration of Mind againſt God and his Miniſters, always will be Vices. The Former have a Rectitude, the Latter an Obliquity, in their Nature, which cannot be changed. The Foreſkin then to be taken away, in this Senſe, is All that Prejudice and Self-conceit, all that carnal or worldly Reaſoning, which obſtructs the Efficacy of Truth upon our Hearts and Lives. For want of this Circumciſion, the *Jews*, who had the Covenant in the Fleſh, were yet out of it, as to its real Advantages, and Spiritual Importance. And without the ſame, the Chriſtian, who diſowns and diſdains all Marks of *Judaiſm*

ism upon his Body, is yet, in Spirit, and to all the Purposes of Sin and Reprobation, an errant *Jew* still.

2. *Secondly*, This true Circumcision of the Spirit imports the weaning ourselves from the World, and setting our Affections upon God and Goodness. Thus much I infer from that other Passage of *Moses*, *The Lord thy God shall Circumcise thy Heart, that thou mayest love the Lord thy God, with all thy Heart and with all thy Soul.* So that, in this Respect, *the first and great Commandment*, as our Saviour calls it, the Foundation and the Substance, the Beginning and Complement, of the whole Moral Law, was shadowed in, and contained under, this most significant Ordinance. And indeed not improperly; Since the retrenching our Desires, and Enjoyments, in things temporal, is the only Expedient for raising up our Minds, to worthy Ideas of things Eternal. For, *God and Mammon cannot dwell together*. Each will engross the whole Breast to himself; and that *Heart* can never *be in Heaven*, which is not first persuaded, that *its Treasure*, its best and only Treasure, is there. Covetousness and Injustice, Worldly-mindedness and Vanity, Luxury and Love of Pleasure, Straitness of Hand and Heart, and Unmercifulness to the Poor and Distressed: In a word, All those corrupt Principles and Dispositions, which argue, that we do not love God, or that we do not love Him better than the World, or that we do not love our Neighbour for His sake, are so many sure Symptoms of an *uncircumcised* Spirit. These then must be pared off, and cast away. And the Pious, the Devout, the Strictly Honest, the chearfully Liberal, the Tender and Compassionate, the Kind and Condescending Christians, They only are the Seed of *Abraham*, They only Heirs of that Covenant, made to that glorious Father of the Faithful.

Deut. xxx. 6.

Matt. xxii. 38.

Matt. vi. 24.

3. *Thirdly*, This Circumcision of the Spirit does yet more immediately denote a strict Guard and Govern-

ment

ment over ourſelves: Reſervedneſs even in the lawful Pleaſures of Senſe, and a total Abſtinence from, and Abhorrence of, all manner of ſcandalous Lewdneſs, and Debauchery in Converſation. Thus much is plain from that of *Jeremiah*, where the *Foreſkin of the Jews Hearts* is explained by *the Evil of their Doings*. And this again is deſcribed in the Chapter next following, by *committing Adultery, aſſembling by Troops in Harlots Houſes, being as fed Horſes in the Morning, every one neighing after his neighbour's Wife*. It is obvious indeed to any, who conſiders at all what Circumciſion was, that the ſubduing of ſenſual and laſcivious Inclinations muſt needs have been meant by it. This is the very firſt Thought, that offers itſelf, and was no doubt one of the chief Ends deſigned by it.

Chap. iv. 4.

Chap. v. 7, 8.

No Man then fulfils the Spiritul intent of that Law now, but the ſober, the regular, the chaſte, the mortified Chriſtian. He that ſubdues his Body, and brings it into Subjection; that curbs his Appetites ſharply, and keeps a ſtrait Rein over his Paſſions. And though This, like the Circumciſion in the Fleſh, be painful; yet done it muſt be, and that early too. No Man in this Caſe can begin too ſoon, becauſe no Man can be in Covenant with God and Chriſt, upon other Terms. *Our Hearts and all our Members muſt be mortified from all worldly and carnal Luſts*, before *we can obey his bleſſed Will*. So that, as great an Undertaking as this may appear, it is yet in Truth but a Preparation to Goodneſs; It is not the whole of our Duty, but the putting us into a Capacity and Readineſs for our Duty. *The Superfluity of Naughtineſs muſt be laid apart, before we can receive the engrafted Word with Meekneſs*. And ſome have ſuppoſed a peculiar Elegance, in that Expreſſion of St. *James*, as alluding to Circumciſion in particular. However that be; The Reſemblance is ſo far good, that God requires Men to part only with Superfluities in both Caſes.

James i. 21.

When

When he bids us be willing to learn and to believe, he does not command us to be blindly implicit, or fooliſhly credulous; but only means, that we ſhould be conſiderate and juſt Judges, of True and Falſe, of Good and Evil. When he calls our Affections off from the World, he does not deny us an honeſt Concern, or a decent Uſe of it; but forbids the making this our whole, or principal, Study and Delight. When he denounces War againſt our Luſts, he does not debar us of neceſſary Recreations, nor condemn the Pleaſures that are moderate and innocent. And thus far every Man is obliged to ſet Bounds to himſelf. Every Chriſtian hath indeed done it already, in that Baptiſm, which the Apoſtle hath therefore moſt emphatically ſtiled, *The Circumciſion made without Hands, and putting off the Body of the Sins of the Fleſh.* This, and nothing leſs, can make it poſſible to profit, by Him, who vouchſafed to be *circumciſed and obedient to the Law for Man.* The Reaſons and Benefits of which Condeſcenſion, the *Goſpel* for this Day will, in the Next place, lead me to conſider. Coloſ. ii. 11.

In the mean while, If it may become us to ſuppoſe One Time fitter than another, for taking Pains with ourſelves, in order to the acquiring, or cheriſhing, or perfecting the good Diſpoſitions I have been preſſing; When can the good Work more ſeaſonably be ſet about, than on this very Day? The Day that opens, as it were, a freſh Scene of Life, by letting us into a New Year. But well it were, if the Rejoicings uſual upon this Account, were mingled with Serioufneſs and prudent Reflection; ſuch, as might render theſe Revolutions of Time Matter of ſolid and unreproveable Joy to us. For ſurely this would either check our Joy, if the Wickedneſs of thoſe already ſpent amiſs, and none of the Succeeding, better than the Former, do juſtly reproach us: Or make us careful, that thoſe yet to come (if any be yet to come) may not have occaſion to reproach us any more. When this is

taken

taken care of, and Men live, like thoſe that muſt give an Account; then are theſe Lengthenings out of Life a Matter of Thanks and Joy, becauſe the more Service we pay, the greater Reward we ſhall be ſure to receive. But let us not mock ourſelves with theſe Solemnities; Nor think, becauſe the Sun is now at the Point he was a Twelvemonth ſince, that We are ſo too. No, very far from that. The State of our Account is greatly altered, and we are ſo much nearer being called upon to give it up. How many, even within the narrow Compaſs of our own Acquaintance, who were then as healthful, as gay, as liberal, as vain in promiſing themſelves many Years, as we perhaps are now, have yet been called to give up their Account already? And were none of Theſe equal to Us, in the Advantages of Age and Strength? Were all Sick, and Old, and Feeble, that they ſhould be taken, and We left? Think with yourſelves a little; And let that thought inſtruct you whether you ought to depend ſo very much upon finiſhing that Year, which you are now beginning. Whether you ought not therefore ſo to begin it, as to reſolve, that it ſhall be a New Year to you, in the moſt Chriſtian and beneficial Senſe. Surely we owe this to the diſtinguiſhing Providence of God, whoſe *Forbearance, and Long-ſuffering, and Goodneſs*, expreſſed in *our Preſervation*, call for the Thanks of living to his Glory. Surely we owe it to Ourſelves, who elſe do but inflame our Reckoning, and *treaſure up to ourſelves Wrath againſt the Day of Wrath*; if, as we draw nearer, ſo we do not take care to be fitter for, Death and Judgment. I conclude therefore with that of the Apoſtle, *Let the time paſt of our Life ſuffice to have wrought the Will of the Gentiles, when we walked in Laſciviouſneſs, Luſts, Exceſs of Wine, Revellings, Banquetings*, and the like. But for the Days, which God of his Mercy permits us to ſee hereafter, Let us (and Lord give us Grace that we may) ſo *number* them, as to *apply our Hearts unto Wiſdom.*

Wiſdom. That Wiſdom, which is from above, and ſeeks thoſe Things that are above, the Things that ſhall endure, when Weeks, and Months, and Years, ſhall be no more: Even an *Inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reſerved in Heaven for us.* Of which God in his infinite Mercy, and at his own due time, make us all partakers, for the ſake of the Son of his Love, Chriſt Jeſus our Lord: To whom, with the Father and Holy Spirit, be all Honour and Glory, henceforth and for evermore. *Amen.*

1 Pet. i. 4.

The GOSPEL.

St. Luke ii. 15.

PARAPHRASE.

15. *AND it came to paſs, as the Angels were gone away from them into heaven, the ſheperds ſaid one to another, Let us go now even unto Bethlehem, and ſee this thing which is come to paſs, which the Lord hath made known unto us.*

15. The Hymn of Praiſe being ended, the Angels were ſeen to return up to Heaven, and then the Shepherds invited and encouraged each other, to go ſee this wonderful thing which they concluded the Angel had, by God's Command, related to them.

16. *And they came with haſte, and found Mary and Joſeph, and the Babe lying in a manger.*

17. *And when they had ſeen it, they made known abroad the ſaying which was told them concerning this child.*

16, 17. Accordingly they came forthwith, and found all things juſt as the Angel had deſcribed. Whereby they were not only convinced themſelves, but publiſhed to others the whole Matter, and what the Angel had declared to them about this Child.

18. *And all they that heard of it, wondered at thoſe things which were told them by the ſhepherds.*

18. The Condition of theſe Relators not rendering them ſuſpected of inventing a Lye, the Relation they gave of the thing, filled all that heard it with Wonder.

19 His

19. His Mother in the mean while contemplated these things ſilently, comparing them one with another, and obſerving how wiſely God ordered them all.

19. *But Mary kept all theſe things, and pondered them in her heart.*

20. But the Shepherds went back to their Flocks, full of Thanks, to God, and joyful at the exact Agreement they found, between what they ſaw, and what the Angel had ſaid.

20. *And the ſhepherds returned, glorifying and praiſing God, for all the things they had heard and ſeen, as it was told unto them.*

21. On the Eighth Day, as the Law appointed, the Child was circumciſed; and then (according to cuſtom) he was named *Jeſus:* Which Name was not choſen by his Mother, or *Joſeph*, but particularly directed by the Angel, who was ſent from God to the Virgin, to foretel, and prepare her for, his Incarnation.

21. *And when eight Days were accompliſhed for the circumciſing of the child, his Name was called Jeſus, which was ſo named of the Angel before he was conceived in the womb.*

COMMENT.

FRom the Conſideration of Circumciſion in general, for which the Epiſtle of this Day miniſtered occaſion, I am now brought by the Goſpel, to obſerve it, as a Rite, which paſſed upon our Bleſſed Saviour in particular. But, before we enter upon the points proper to be inſiſted on, upon that occaſion; it may not be amiſs to ſay, how the Account of this Matter, given us in the Cloſe of this Scripture, proves that our Lord was actually Circumciſed. For the Words, as they ſtand in our *Engliſh* Tranſlation, might be ſo interpreted, as only to import our Bleſſed Saviour's receiving the Name of *Jeſus*, at the ſame Diſtance of Time from his Birth, which was the uſual and appointed Day, for *Jewiſh* Children to be circumciſed upon: And ſo, as not neceſſarily to determine, whether this Name were given him with that Rite, or without it.

Ver. 21.

But

But here it is to be obſerved, that the Original Language reads a Conjunction, which Ours hath omitted. The Verſe then, ſtrictly and literally, runs thus, *When Eight Days were accompliſhed for the Circumciſing of the Child, and his Name was called Jeſus*, &c. Which Particle *and* is not perhaps wholly ſuperfluous, as ſome Criticks and our Tranſlators have eſteemed it: But rather very ſignificant, and, by an *Ellipſis*, in which the *Greek* Tongue is known to abound, implies the Repetition of the foregoing Verb, and may be thus ſupplied, *When eight Days were accompliſhed for the circumciſing of the Child*, and he was circumciſed, *his Name was called Jeſus.*

Such Brevity is the more excuſable, in the preſent Caſe, becauſe the thing was abundantly notorious, that the *Jews*, of that and former Ages, did always name their Children, at the time of Circumciſing them; that they never impoſed Names ſolemnly upon Males, but at that Time; and that they durſt not do it, without the Uſe of Circumciſion. Of this the Evangeliſt had, juſt before, mentioned a famous Inſtance, in the Caſe of *John* the Baptiſt. Of this, with regard to our Lord, St. *Paul* hath left ſufficient Intimation, when declaring him to be *made under the Law*, that is, to have ſubmitted to its Ordinances. Which he did not by any means ſubmit to, if this ſo very important Ordinance were not performed upon him, in ſuch Time, and Manner, as the Law directs.

Luke i. 59.

Gal. iv. 4.

Thus much being premiſed, to ſhew what Reaſon we have, even from the Text before us, to ſatisfy ourſelves, that our Lord was really circumciſed: I now apply myſelf to obſerve from hence,

I. *Firſt*, The Reaſons, for which it was convenient he ſhould be ſo.

II. *Secondly*, the Importance of the Name given to him when he was ſo: and

III. *Thirdly*, The Time, when both theſe things were done.

I. Under

1. Under my *First* head, which aſſigns the Reaſons, why it was convenient for our Bleſſed Lord to be Circumciſed, I might enlarge on great Variety. But it will be ſufficient to inſiſt on thoſe, which ſeem to be the Principal; and ſuch as are neareſt allied to thoſe uſes, attributed, in my laſt Diſcourſe, to Circumciſion in general.

1. Look upon This then, *Firſt*, as a Mark of Diſtinction, and thus it became *Jeſus* to be Circumciſed, that he might qualify himſelf the better, for Acceptance and free Converſation with the *Jews*. The very mingling with Men that were otherwiſe, was eſteemed a Pollution. And accordingly we find St. *Peter*, when coming to *Cornelius* and his Company, making this Apology for himſelf, *Ye know that it is an unlawful thing, for a Man that is a Jew, to keep company, or come unto one of another Nation: but God hath ſhewed me, that I ſhould not call any Man common or unclean.* Now, that this uncleanneſs did not proceed merely from foreignneſs of Birth, is evident, not only from the conſtant practice of receiving Perſons, of any Nation whatſoever, into all the Rights of Natives, when ſubmitting to this Rite; But alſo, from the Terms of the Accuſation, brought againſt St. *Peter* upon this Account. For They who *contended with him*, ſaid, *Thou wenteſt in to Men uncircumciſed, and didſt eat with them.* Reproach, and Scorn, and a haughty Diſtance, was the Treatment, ſuch Perſons had to expect. And therefore *Timothy* was *taken and circumciſed by St. Paul, becauſe of the Jews that were in thoſe quarters*, to render his Miniſtry acceptable among them. The Errand then, upon which Chriſt came to his own Countrymen, had otherwiſe been abſolutely loſt; No Audience at all given to it, no Opportunities allowed of Preaching, or Conferring publickly, nay, not even of Eating and Drinking, and inſinuating himſelf in private Converſation. For, had not this Ceremony paſſed upon

Acts x. 28.

xi. 2, 3.

xvi. 3.

upon him, they would, agreeably to their own Principles, for diſregarding it, have ſhunned a Man, whoſe only Buſineſs with them was to inſtruct and convert them to the Truth.

Thus hath our Bleſſed Maſter ſet us all a Pattern, of being well content, to put ourſelves under ſome hardſhips and reſtraints, which are not neceſſary upon our own Accounts; when we foreſee, that Theſe will help forward the Good of Others, and bring us into a Condition of doing their Souls Service. And even Great things ſhould not be declined, which will gain us acceſs to the Hearts of our Brethren, render our Advice more prevailing, our Company upon Religious Accounts more agreeable, and the wholeſome Truths, we labour to inſtil, better heard, more kindly taken, and conſequently more ſucceſsfully conſidered. As certainly they will, as oft as any Prejudice, known to lie againſt the Perſon attempting to perſuade, is firſt removed out of the way.

2. *Secondly*, As Circumciſion was a Commemorative Sign of *Abraham*, and of the Covenant made with Him, ſo was it likewiſe highly requiſite for Chriſt to undergo it. Of Him was that moſt Glorious of all Promiſes to *Abraham* intended, *In thy Seed ſhall all the Nations of the Earth be bleſſed.* Which made it fit the World ſhould have this Teſtimony alſo, of his being truly and rightly deſcended from that Anceſtor. The Privileges, granted in that Covenant, made the Patriarch, from whom they were derived down, The Glory and Boaſt of his Poſterity. Now, when the Mediator of a better Covenant came, the Former however was to recede with Honour; And, that it might do ſo, his own Example approved a Sacrament of his Father's Inſtitution, by taking it upon his own Perſon. So certifying, that This, as Things then ſtood, was the proper Method of recommending Men to the Favour and Bleſſing of God, and the Rights of the Covenant-State.

Gal. iii. 16.

So many, and indeed ſundry more, Circumſtances concur, to render the Circumciſion of Chriſt reaſonable: as an addition of Honour to the Ordinance of God, and a firmer Eſtabliſhment of their Minds, who, tho' about to be releaſed from it, yet came over to the Faith, from a Profeſſion, which had ſubjected them to, and taught them to depend upon the Uſe of it, as a Proof of the Truth of God, and a Confirmation of the Benefits, originally indented for, with the Father of the Bleſſed Seed.

But that's not all. The Evidence of his being the Son of *Abraham*, even in a larger and looſer Senſe, was neceſſary: I mean, the making it appear, that he was Very Man. For, as the Race of which he came, muſt be made clear to the *Jews*, who were long ago warned to expect a Meſſiah of the Seed of *Abraham*, the Tribe of *Judah*, and the Houſe and Lineage of *David*; So muſt the Subſtance of his Human Nature, to ſilence the Perverſeneſs of ſome antient Hereticks, who will not allow him of any Line at all. Theſe Men (ſo wild and extravagant is Error) contended, that the Word of God appeared only as Man, and, in that Form, taught and did Miracles. Now this Opinion, one would think abundantly prevented, it is at leaſt ſufficiently confuted, by the ſingle act we are upon. For that could never be performed upon an empty Form. Fleſh and Blood only, was in condition to be wounded by a Knife; a Shadow could neither bleed, nor be cut away; And this proves the Reality of his Human Body.

But ſtill this particular Proof of it was not equally neceſſary to All, becauſe all did not ſtand obliged to this Ceremony. Many other Actions and Sufferings of his Life argued the Truth of his Humanity, and therefore This had a farther End. For, the chuſing this Method, and ſubmitting to Circumciſion, at a regular time, and as a Religious Rite, was a Proof of his Conſanguinity to that Generation of Men, who made

this

this a ſolemn part of their Worſhip. Any cutting and bleeding would have proved him the Son of Man, but this cutting and bleeding only could have any force for proving him the Son of that Man, of whoſe Seed the Chriſt was promiſed to come.

3. *Thirdly*, As Circumciſion was a Seal of a mutual Covenant, in this reſpect alſo it was expedient for Chriſt to be Circumciſed. Not upon his own perſonal Account indeed; but for the ſake of Others, whoſe Perſons he came to repreſent, and whoſe Cauſe he undertook. Thus much we acknowledge, in the Collect for this Feſtival, when ſaying, that *Almighty God made his bleſſed Son to be circumciſed, and obedient to the Law for Man.* He had no Sin of his own to be done away; but, by doing the ſame Penance with thoſe that had, he declared the Efficacy of this Ordinance, to all the Faithful, who then applied it for that purpoſe. As God, he was ſuperior to, and could not be bound by, this his own Law: But the Figure now to be made, was that of a Man; And, as ſuch, he was born within the limits where it obtained, and ſubjected himſelf to the voluntary obſervance of it.

Again. That whole Law, ſo far forth as it was a carnal Commandment, he came to aboliſh; but before its Abolition it muſt be fulfilled. And, becauſe this never had been, never could be, done ſtrictly and punctually by any Other, he did it in the behalf of Them, who failed in the performance. The Sentence of the Curſe continued in full force, till ſome Perſon appeared, on whom it could take no hold. And therefore, by this initiating Ceremony, he contracted for a perfect Obedience; and He, of all that had contracted, was the ſingle Perſon, that made his Engagement good. Thus, getting above the Law, he ſupplied the Defects of his Brethren; and, in vertue of his own unblemiſhed Righteouſneſs, introduced a gentler and more practicable Condition, by exchanging the Righteouſneſs of Works, for that of Faith. So St. *Paul*, *Now* Rom. xv. 8.

I ſay, that Jeſus Chriſt was a Miniſter of the Circumciſion for the truth of God, to confirm the promiſes made unto the Fathers. Upon which Words St. *Chryſoſtom* hath the following Reflection, very appoſite to the Subject we are handling.

" The Promiſe was made to *Abraham*, but all his Pro-
" geny rendered themſelves obnoxious to Puniſhment,
" For the Tranſgreſſion of the Law brought Wrath up-
" on them, and overthrew all Claim to the Promiſe of
" the Fathers. The Son therefore came, and compound-
" ed the Matter with the Father; ſo as that thoſe Pro-
" miſes ſhould be made good, and obtain their intend-
" ed effect. For he, by fulfilling the whole Law, and
" particularly Circumciſion, did both by this, and by
" his Croſs, deliver from the Curſe, conſequent upon
" the Tranſgreſſion, and ſo kept the Promiſe from fal-
" ling to the ground. The Apoſtle therefore, when
" ſtyling him the *Miniſter of Circumciſion*, means thus
" much: That he, by coming and fulfilling the whole
" Law, by being Circumciſed, and the Seed of *Abra-*
" *ham*, took off the Curſe, appeaſed the Wrath of God,
" and rendered them, who were thus delivered from
" their Offences, capable of receiving the Promiſe for
" the future. Thus he turns the Argument back up-
" on Them, who urge the Circumciſion of Chriſt, and
" his obſervance of the Law, to prove, that it ought
" to continue, and muſt ſtill oblige. For in effect he
" reaſons thus: All this was done, not that the Law
" might ſtand, but that he might take it away; deli-
" ver thee from the Curſe then hanging over thee, and
" from thenceforth ſet thee perfectly at large from its
" Dominion. Thy having tranſgreſſed and fallen
" ſhort of the Law, was the Reaſon why He fulfilled
" it. But this he did, not with an intent, that Thou
" ſhouldeſt fulfil it after him; but that he might ſe-
" cure to thee the Promiſes made to the Fathers, which
" the Law had defeated, by convicting thee of Sin,
" and proving thee unworthy of the Inheritance. So

" that Thou alſo, O *Jew*, art ſaved thro' Grace; for " thy Condition too was loſt without it." So this admirable Interpreter.

Thus the Son of God ſubmitted, in great Humility, to the ſame mortifying Remedies with common Men; And his Goodneſs was content to ſuffer that, upon the account of others, which was in no degree neceſſary upon his own. He hath aſſerted our Liberty by this voluntary Bondage, and by bearing a Yoke, much too heavy for any Neck but His, hath taken it effectually off from Ours. Thus did he begin to ſave us, as ſoon as he was born; and ſhed the firſt Fruits of his Blood for Men, immediately after his receiving it. So truly was He our *Jeſus*, ſo well deſerving that name, who became ſuch, from the very Moment of his being called ſo. The Reaſon and Importance whereof is my

II. *Second* Head, *His Name was called Jeſus*, ſays the Text, and *ſo named he* was of *the Angel, before he was conceived in the Womb.* We read but of few Inſtances in Scripture, where Men had Names determined for them, by particular appointment from Heaven, and before the time of their Birth. And, as ſuch Names appear to have been very ſignificant; ſo the Perſons, diſtinguiſhed by them, were always remarkable for ſome very extraordinary Qualities, or Events, which their reſpective Names were * deſigned to denote. This Obſervation was in no Caſe made good ſo conſpicuouſly, as in that now before us. Our Lord's Name is indeed, in Senſe and Subſtance, the ſame with *Joſhua:* That famous Leader heretofore, who, after the Death of *Moſes*, ſettled the *Iſraelites* in their promiſed Land, and ſubdued their Enemies, who oppoſed their Entrance into it. But, as that Earthly was a Figure of the Heavenly *Canaan*, ſo was the Captain of That an eminent Type of the Captain of Our Salvation. And if He was worthy to be called a Saviour,

* Solomon. 1 Chron. xxii. 9, 10.
Joſiah. 1 Kings xiii. 2.
Cyrus. Iſa. xiv. 1, 4.
John Baptiſt. Luke i. 13, 17.

much more is this Jeſus what his Name imports. For He delivers from the heavieſt of all Bondages, from the moſt formidable of all Enemies; As He, and He only it is, who *ſave his People from their Sins.*

To underſtand, and value as we ought, the Greatneſs of this Salvation, we muſt be ſenſible of the Greatneſs of our Danger and Miſery without it. And this we may quickly be, by a ſhort Recollection of the diſmal Conſequences of Sin unpardoned, and unconquered.

By This then Men offend againſt a righteous Law, they go againſt their Intereſt and their Duty, they provoke a Holy and a Juſt God, they contract a deep Guilt, wound their own Conſciences, ſtir up the Wrath of an Avenger, whoſe Power enables him, and whoſe Truth obliges him to puniſh their Diſobedience, with inexpreſſible and everlaſting Torments, both of Body and Soul. By Sin they defile their Nature, and debauch their Principles, bring themſelves under the Tyranny of their unruly Paſſions, and vicious Habits; And, as every Act of this kind repeated adds to their Guilt, ſo does it bind them faſter in their Slavery, put it more out of their Power to ſhake off their Chains, and heap up a greater Portion of Wrath againſt the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God.

Now all theſe dreadful Conſequences our Bleſſed Saviour did, and He alone could, deliver us from. The Guilt and Stain of our Sins he waſhed away by his Blood; The Puniſhment due to them he releaſed, by becoming our Sacrifice, and ſuffering in our ſtead: The Anger of God he hath thus appeaſed, and reconciled us to his once diſpleaſed Father: The Power of Sin he ſubdues by his Grace; by the Doctrines of his Goſpel enlightening, by the Aſſiſtance of his Spirit ſtrengthening and influencing our Minds, by all thoſe Means and wiſe Methods, in ſhort, which were neceſſary for our Condition. By all indeed, that are proper for it; All, that our weak and wretched Circumſtances

wanted, who are but Men, frail, corrupt, ſinful Creatures; All, that our Circumſtances would bear, remembering, that we ſtill are Men, free and rational Creatures.

For, as it was before, in *Iſrael*'s temporal Deliverance, that, tho' effected by the Conduct of *Joſhua*, and the wonderful Bleſſing of God upon his Undertakings, yet had the People too Their Part in it, and, by obeying his Orders, and fighting their own Battles, were inſtrumental in their own Deliverance: So it is here. This *Jeſus* is our Leader, he leads us out to War, he iſſues out his Orders, and aſſigns to us our reſpective Poſts. And it is Our part to follow, to obey, to fight under him: to watch and guard againſt the common Foe; to uſe the Weapons he puts into our Hands: and ſo to work out our own Salvation. He hath done all that for us, which we could not do for ourſelves, but what we can do, is ſtill left upon our Hands. Yet ſo left, that, provided We be willing, He will make us able to do it. In One Word, he ſaves his People from their Sins; But ſtill they are *his People* whom he ſaves. Them that believe his Word, obey his Precepts, devote themſelves to his Service, and deſire and endeavour, ſo far as in them lies, to ſave themſelves from them. Leſs than this had he done, he had not filled the Importance of his Name; and more had defeated the Deſign of it. For, to ſave thoſe from Puniſhment, who are ſtill fond of the Guilt, had not been to take away, but rather to promote, the Dominion, and encourage the Practice, of Sin. A Deſign, unworthy of God, unprofitable to Man, and by no means agreeable to the Tenor of his Goſpel, to the Nature of a Covenant in general, or to the glorious Privileges, ſet forth in that moſt Bleſſed Name of *Jeſus*. He would but half have ſaved us, had he not provided for our Holineſs here, as well as our Happineſs hereafter; and made the One, as attainable, ſo neceſſary too, in order to the Other. And hence it is, that the Temper of this Salvation is repreſented to us, in that Prophetick Song of

Luke i. 74, 75. *Zacharias*; by *being delivered from our Enemies, that we might ſerve him without Fear, in Holineſs and Righteouſneſs before him all the Days of our Life.*

Certain it is, That this adorable Name is a Name of Peace and Love, of Comfort and Joy, to All, on whom the Power of it takes place. But, in regard All are not *Iſrael* that are of *Iſrael*; Nor every one, who calls himſelf a Chriſtian, an actual Partaker of the Bleſſings of God in Chriſt: It will concern us all, to ſee and know, whether the Mercies implied in this Name, have had their proper Effect and Influence upon us. If then the Covetous Man be not ſaved from his Avarice and Hardheartedneſs; nor the Drunkard from his Riot and Revelling; Nor the Laſcivious and Unclean from his Lewdneſs; Nor the Peeviſh from his Spirit of Contention; Nor the Revengeful from his Malice; Nor the Proud from Vanity and Ambition; Nor the Profuſe from his unprofitable Extravagance; Nor the Profane from his Reproaches and Contempt of Religion; to be ſhort, If Men continue in Sins unrepented of; If they love and like the Fault, how much ſoever they abhor and dread the Shame, or the Puniſhment; If they encourage, entice, perſuade, harden others in Sin, by their Diſcourſe, or by their Examples; To every ſuch Man our Bleſſed Lord is no *Jeſus* at all, nor does there any one of the innumerable Benefits, implied in that charming Word, belong to him. But to the penitent Sinner, to the devout Worſhipper, to the juſt and honeſt Dealer, to the bountiful Alms-giver, to the ſober and the pure, to the meek and the peaceable, to the humble and the mortified Chriſtian; to the diligent Worker out of his own, and the zealous Promoter of other Men's Salvation; The Safety and Defence, the Support and the Joy, of a *Jeſus*, to Them is unconceivable. Becauſe they feel already his powerful Operation on their Hearts; They know, that Temptations cannot hurt, where He ſhields; nor Sins condemn,

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where He pardons; nor Adverſity oppreſs, where He ſuſtains; Nor Death or Devils drive to Deſpair, where He, who is the Reſurrection and the Life, hath given the Pledges of his Love, and Earneſts of Life, Everlaſting. Let us then labour, and let us pray, with all our Might, that it may never be our Condemnation, to periſh in the midſt of Succours: to refuſe and neglect a Salvation, which courts us to accept it; to defeat all that hath been done for us; to take a Name into our Mouths, of ſuch Heavenly Importance in itſelf, yet of no Significance to Us. But do Thou, Bleſſed Jeſus, help Us to anſwer Ours, as Thou haſt, and always wilt anſwer Thy, Character; that we may be thy Redeemed, thy People, thy Saved from our Sins; and Thou our Refuge and Truſt, our Hope and our Joy, our All that we can have or hope for; to all Intents our Jeſus. In every trying Circumſtance, in every ſorrowful Hour, in the Temptations of Youth, in the Decays of Age, in the Languiſhings of Sickneſs, in the Agonies of Death, and in the Terrors of Judgment: In theſe we are undone without thee, from theſe none can ſave us beſides thee, and from them all, we know thou canſt, thou wilt ſave us, if thou do but in Mercy begin the good Work, at preſent in our Hearts, and ſave us from our Sins.

III. It remains now, in the *Laſt* place, that I ſpeak to the particular Time, both of circumciſing, and naming our Lord, ſaid here to be, *when Eight Days were accompliſhed*. Of which very briefly.

By *Eight Days being accompliſhed*, is certainly intended the Eighth Day being come. Of which, as we have other Paſſages of like Importance, ſo have we the Direction of the Law, to aſſure us. The parallel Places may ſatisfy us, *That on the Eighth Day, after Eight Days, and Eight Days accompliſhed*, are Terms exactly equivalent. The Letter of the Law is expreſs, in limiting the Time for this Ceremony; not allowing it ſooner; not forgiv-

Matth xvi. 21. Mark x. 31. Matth. xxvii. 63. xxviii. 1. John xix. 31, 42. xx. 1. Acts ii. 1, 15. Gen. xvii. Levit. xii.

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ing the Omiſſion of it longer. And much ſurely need not be ſaid, to perſuade your Belief of the Law being in this Caſe punctually obſerved in all its Circumſtances, by Him, whoſe Compliance with the Subſtance was an Act of free Choice, and who intended to leave no part undone, which was required of Them, whom he came to releaſe from it.

The Reaſons of fixing this preciſe Time Learned Men have been much divided about. But among their ſeveral Conjectures, (for they are no better) not any ſeems more probable, than that which aſcribes it to taking the firſt Opportunity, after a new-born Child could be ſuppoſed capable of enduring ſo painful an Operation, and before the Parent's Affection was too ſtrong to expoſe his Offspring to the Anguiſh of it. And all this ſeems likewiſe to agree very well with a Cuſtom, almoſt univerſal in the World, of devoting Infants, of every Country and Perſuaſion, very early to the Service, and commending them to the Protection, of the Deity they worſhipped. Of which, to mention no more, the *offering Sons and Daughters unto Devils*, and making *Children paſs thro' the Fire*, ſo giving them *to Moloch*, are famous Inſtances, upon Record in Scripture.

Pſal. cvi. 37.
Levit. xviii. 21. xx. 2.

As evident it is, that, not only with the *Jews* in Circumciſion, but with other Nations, at the Performance of the Ceremonies laſt obſerved, a particular Name was impoſed. Not only as a diſtinguiſhing Character for Civil Convenience, but eſpecially upon a Religious Account; that the Fellow-Profeſſors might know their new Proſelytes, and that the Party himſelf, by this conſtant Memorial, might be continually reminded of, and quickened in, the Engagements entered into, at the ſolemn receiving of It.

I ought to add alſo, That, as our Lord's own Name had, ſo the generality of pious and ſober Perſons have always thought it decent, that the Names impoſed upon theſe Occaſions ſhould have ſomewhat ſignificant

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in them. Whence, among Chriſtians it hath grown into a very Commendable Cuſtom, to make choice of thoſe Names, which either Scripture, or undoubted Hiſtory, hath aſſured us, had the Honour to be borne by Men and Women of Conſpicuous Piety and Virtue. That ſo theſe Examples might inſpire a noble Emulation of their good Qualities and Actions; or elſe reproach us, if we degenerate from the Patterns of thoſe bright Saints, whoſe Lives and Deaths ſtamped ſuch a Value on their Memory, as to tranſmit their Names to, and make them coveted by, Poſterity.

The only Uſe, I deſire to improve this Head to at preſent, is, to applaud, and earneſtly recommend the Care of dedicating our Children to our Lord and Maſter in Holy Baptiſm, with the Firſt Convenience of doing it. The Benefits of this Practice are more than can, The objections againſt it weaker than need, be inſiſted on. Let it ſuffice to ſay, That Circumciſion was as much a Covenant heretofore, as Baptiſm is now: That, what God then expreſly ordained for Them, he cannot be ſuppoſed to diſapprove with Us. For, Is he the God of the Infants of the *Jews*, and is he not ſo, of the Chriſtians? Can this be thought ſo much a better and more gracious Covenant, ſuppoſing it to exclude ſo many Millions of Souls, which the Former readily received, nay, peremptorily demanded? And, is it not enough, that theſe are not poſitively refuſed, to ſatisfy us, that, tho' the Ordinance be changed, yet the Subjects and Privileges of it continue ſtill the ſame? Why then do any of us undertake, to make the Gate yet ſtraiter, to ſhut up the Mercies, and leſſen the Family of God? Why repreſent the Bleſſed *Jeſus* leſs kind, than *Moſes?* No, let us rather loſe no Moment's Time of impreſſing upon our Offſpring the Marks of the New Covenant. Let us make the beſt Reparation we can, for the Stain and Guilt we convey to them, by ſeeing this immediately waſhed off, in *that Fountain opened* by Jeſus Chriſt, *for Sin and for Uncleanneſs*; even the

the Laver of Regeneration, the Sacrament of Baptiſm. Let us deliver them up to His Care, who is gracious to all Ages, and cannot but embrace, and adopt, the tender Innocence of Thoſe, who are propounded as a Pattern, for all that enter into his Kingdom. And are Thoſe, to whom all that enter in muſt be like, not capable of entering in Themſelves? This happy Prevention will be their Security, againſt the Power of the Enemy, and the Seducements of a crooked and perverſe Generation. And He, who ſhed his firſt Blood at *Eight Days* old, will know and ſave Them, who begin to be His, at the ſame Age. But withal, let it be our conſtant Buſineſs, to ſecond and confirm theſe good Beginnings, by timely Inſtruction, and a virtuous Education. For dreadful will their Condemnation be, whoſe own Bowels ſhall riſe up againſt them in the Day of Judgment; and upbraid that cruel Fondneſs, which laid the Foundation of their Vices, and their Torments. But bleſſed are thoſe pious Souls, who increaſe the Kingdom of God, with every Addition to their own Family; who double every Joy of Heaven to themſelves, by thoſe of the Children, which they have led, or ſent before them thither; by a Race of good Men here, and of glorified Saints hereafter. Which, that they may all be, God of his infinite Mercy grant, for the ſake of his dear Son, Chriſt Jeſus, our Bleſſed Saviour and only Redeemer: To whom be Glory for ever. *Amen.*

The EPIPHANY; *or the* MANIFESTATION *of* CHRIST *to the* GENTILES.

The COLLECT.

Matth. ii. 2, 9, 10.

O God, who by the leading of a Star didſt manifeſt thy only begotten Son to the Gentiles; Mercifully grant, that we, which know thee now by Faith, may after this Life have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord, *Amen.*

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The EPISTLE.

Ephes. iii. 1. PARAPHRASE.

1. *FOR this cauſe, I Paul, the priſoner of Jeſus Chriſt for you Gentiles.*

1. Since therefore God hath been graciouſly pleaſed to unite *Jews* and *Gentiles* into one myſtical Body (ſee Chap. ii.) I, who have ſuffered ſo many Perſecutions, and am now under Impriſonment at *Rome*, for aſſerting the Privileges of the *Gentile* Converts to the Faith, *beſeech you to walk worthy of the Vocation wherewith ye are called.* (Chap. iv. 1.)

2. *If ye have heard of the Diſpenſation of the Grace of God, which is given me to youward.*

3. *How that by revelation he made known unto me the myſtery, (as I wrote afore in few Words.*

4. *Whereby when ye read, ye may underſtand my knowledge in the myſtery of Chriſt.)*

5. *Which in other ages was not made known unto the Sons of Men, as it is now made known unto his Apoſtles and Prophets by the Spirit.*

2, 3, 4, 5. For ſure ye cannot but know how God hath commiſſioned me to be your Preacher and Apoſtle; and that God, by ſpecial Revelation, declared to me that ſecret Purpoſe, (of which I have ſpoken briefly in the two Chapters foregoing) which they who lived heretofore had not the like diſtinct knowledge of, as is now by the Holy Ghoſt imparted to the Miniſters of the Goſpel. (For the calling of the *Gentiles*, though predicted under the Old Teſtament, yet was not, as to all the Terms and Methods, and Privileges of it, underſtood as now it is.)

6. *That the Gentiles ſhould be fellow-heirs, and of the ſame body, and partakers of his Promiſe in Chriſt by the Goſpel.*

6. That purpoſe of God I mean, concerning the *Gentiles* being received into all the Privileges of the Goſpel, (not as they that were Proſelytes to the *Jewiſh* Church had uſed to be, but) in all points upon equal advantage with the *Jews*, and this too without any obligation of ſubmitting to their Law.

7. *Whereof I was made a miniſter, according to the gift of the Grace of God given unto me, by the effectual working of his power.*

7. And, in order to the making known and bringing about this purpoſe,

poſe, it hath pleaſed God in his great Goodneſs, to make uſe of Men as an Inſtrument, and to certify his choice and approbation of me, by Miracles confirming the Doctrine I preach.

8, 9. Not that I ſuppoſe myſelf to have any Merit or Abilities ſuperior to others. Quite otherwiſe. But it hath pleaſed God to commit to me, the meaneſt of Chriſtians, that greateſt of Truſts; to bring the glad Tidings to the Gentiles, of the ineſtimable benefits of the Goſpel, and the wonderful goodneſs of Chriſt, in knitting all Nations together in one Body, which hath been God's deſign all along, who thus both made the Material, and new-made the Spiritual World, by Jeſus Chriſt.

8. *Unto me, who am leſs than the leaſt of all Saints, is this grace given, that I ſhould preach among the Gentiles the unſearchable riches of Chriſt:*

9. *And to make all men ſee what is the fellowſhip of the myſtery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jeſus Chriſt.*

10, 11. Thus, by the gathering of ſuch a Church Univerſal, that intricate and wonderful Wiſdom of God will appear to all the World, Earth and Heaven, Men and Angels; Thoſe Spirits above, or, (as others) the Heathen Powers and Princes, and Magiſtrates of this World, for ſo ἀρχαὶ καὶ ἐξουσίαι are uſed (*Luke* xii. 11. and *Tit.* iii. 1.) The ſeveral Methods, and Diſpenſations in every Age, being now manifeſtly ſeen to conſpire, in accompliſhing that purpoſe of God from all Eternity, of ſaving all Mankind by Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.

10. *To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly* places *might be known by the Church the manifold wiſdom of God,*

11. *According to the eternal purpoſe which he purpoſed in Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.*

12. And as all God's dealing with Men center in Him, ſo do all our hopes too. For the believing and truſting in him, as our Saviour, this, and this only, does procure us admittance to God, and qualify us to come freely, as reſting upon, and being well aſſured of, his Love and Favour upon this account.

12. *In whom we have boldneſs and acceſs, with confidence, by the faith of him.*

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COMMENT.

THAT this Feſtival was always had in great Veneration, is evident from the Writings of the Fathers, and the conſtant practice of all Ages in the Chriſtian Church. How deſervedly it was ſo, appears from the mighty Bleſſings, commemorated by it: The Manifeſtation of our Lord and Saviour, not only to the Wiſe Men, who came from the Eaſt to worſhip him; but to all thoſe, of whom They were the Figures and Forerunners, the whole Gentile World. Thus was the Mercy accompliſhed, which in Them had been begun. Thus is the Solemnity of our Lord's Birth cloſed with Thankſgivings, for a Benefit, which finiſhed, and gave effect to, all we have already praiſed him for. For, to how little purpoſe had Light come into the World, if the World had not been directed to, and made partakers of, that Light? Moſt juſt therefore are the Solemnities of this Day, Moſt fitly do they follow thoſe of our Lord's Incarnation, which celebrate a Diſcovery ſo happy; that without it, that very Incarnation, an act of Grace, how Glorious and Wonderful ſoever in itſelf, had yet been no Bleſſing to Us.

It was a farther Acceſſion to the Honour of this Day, that the the Holy *Jeſus* is ſuppoſed to have been, upon it, baptiſed in the River *Jordan* by *John*. Which St. *Chryſoſtom* mentions, not only as a thing notorious in his time, but as a principal Cauſe of the Reſpects paid to it by the Church. To which let me add an ancient Tradition, that upon this Day alſo, our Saviour is ſuppoſed to have given the firſt Proof of his Divine Power, by turning Water into Wine, at the Marriage in *Cana* of *Galilee*.

Tom. v. Serm. 74. Ed. *Eton.*

Upon ſo many Accounts, hath this Feſtival been thought to challenge our more than ordinary Regard. The Memory of the Two latter continues ſtill to be, in

Luke iii. John ii.

in ſome meaſure, preſerved and acknowledged, by the Second Leſſons appointed for Morning and Evening Service. But the Two former, as more important in themſelves and their Conſequences, and more nearly concerning Us, are chiefly recommended to our Obſervation. Of Theſe, the Goſpel propounds to Us the Caſe of the Wiſemen; The Epiſtle, that of the Gentiles at large. This I am now therefore to enter upon; And it does not appear to me, what better or more ſeaſonable improvement can be made of it, than by conſidering the matter at large; and by endeavouring to repreſent, as briefly and plainly as I can.

I. *Firſt*, The miſerable Condition of Mankind, as it was before, and muſt for ever have continued, without the Coming of our Bleſſed Saviour.

II *Secondly*, The Happy Change, effected by his Coming, and the Manifeſtation of him to the World. From whence will naturally and manifeſtly follow, a

III. *Third Conſideration*, concerning the Influence and good Effect, which the Two Heads foregoing ought to have upon us.

I. The *Firſt* thing that offers itſelf to us, is the miſerable Condition of Mankind, as it was before, and would for ever have continued, without the Coming and Manifeſtation of a Saviour. Of this the Scriptures try to make Us ſenſible, by great Variety of Repreſentations. All of them very Pertinent, all very Melancholy and Moving: But, to make as ſhort Work as I can, I will confine myſelf to One; than which, as none is more familiar and frequent, ſo none can be more ſuitable and proper; for indeed it Comprehends, and implies all the reſt, under the Name of *Darkneſs*.

* 2 Cor. iv. 6. vi. 11. 1 John ii. 8. † Rom. xiii. 12. Epheſ. v. 11. ‖ Rev. xvi. 10.

Thus the Ignorance of the Heathens is emphatically called * *Darkneſs*; their Vices, The † *Works of Darkneſs*; Their Superſtition and Idolatry, ‖ the *Kingdom of Darkneſs*; The Objects of their falſe Worſhip

Worſhip, *Rulers* * *of Darkneſs*; and the Perſons under the Tyranny of theſe Abominations, are ſaid to *walk* † *in Darkneſs, to ſit and abide in Darkneſs, to love Darkneſs*, to be *of the Night and of Darkneſs*, nay, even to *be Darkneſs itſelf*.

* Eph. vi. 12.
† 1 John i. 6. ii. 11. Luke i. 79. John xii. 46. iii. 19. 1 Theſ. v. 5. Epheſ. v. 8.

By comparing theſe Expreſſions we may ſoon be convinced, that the Holy Ghoſt deſigned to ſignify what our own Senſes and Experience prove Darkneſs to be. A State of utter Inactivity or perpetual Wandering; A State of Danger and Diſcomfort, of Fears unaccountable, and Terror inſupportable: Of all, that can anſwer the wretched Condition of Men loſt, and bewildered in the Night, with Snares and Precipices on every Side them: A State that robs us of our nobleſt Senſe, diſables or confounds all our Powers of motion, and is that, to which, of all other Calamities, we ſeem to have the moſt natural, the moſt juſt, the moſt unconquerable, Averſion.

How well the Condition of the Gentiles heretofore deſerved this Metaphor in all its diſmal import, as it is not poſſible fully to declare, ſo neither is it of any great Conſequence now to underſtand. Except ſo far, as a Senſe of this Miſery may contribute to worthy and thankful apprehenſions of the Goodneſs of God, expreſſed in that happy Change of Affairs, which is reſerved for the Subject of my *Second* Head.

I. Now *Firſt*. As Darkneſs denotes Ignorance and Error, Theirs, it is evident, was groſs and general; a Darkneſs that might even be felt. To prove this, we need no long Particular, no tragical Enumeration of the Vices, or the Superſtitions, which brought a Scandal upon Human Nature; after a very ſhort deſcription by St. *Paul*, which more than ſuffices for that purpoſe.

For, Who can read the firſt Chapter to the *Romans*, without Amazement and many mortifying Reflections, to ſee Rational Creatures capable of ſo wretched a

Degeneracy; that no object was ſo deſpicable, as not to be thought worthy of Divine Honours; No Vice ſo deteſtable or brutiſh, as not to obtain, not only in common Converſation, but even in their Rituals of Religion, and moſt Solemn Acts of Worſhip?

Some few great Souls indeed did raiſe themſelves, above the Rubbiſh and Filth of theſe Ruins of Human Nature. They lamented, or deſpiſed, the Stupidity, or the Credulity of the Vulgar. But that Knowledge, which diſcerned the Folly of Others, was not able to attain Wiſdom itſelf. And the effect of it ſeems to have been perpetual Scepticiſm; A floating between all Opinions and Principles, diſcarding that which was manifeſtly wrong, but not ſettling their Minds in that which is good and right. In matters too of moral Good and Evil, though ſome of the Rules and Reflections they have left us, are at once matter of Wonder, and Reproach, to the many, many Chriſtians, who neglect the Improvement of a much clearer Light; yet even here, they who advanced fartheſt, ſtopped a great way ſhort. The Nature and Obliquity of ſeveral Vices, The proper ends of Moral Actions in general, The certainty of a future State, The ſolemn Account to be rendered of all our Actions; Theſe, which now are, or ought to be, the governing Principles of every Chriſtian's behaviour, were what they underſtood but little of, and conſequently could not be greatly influenced by. This produced, both in their Diſcourſes ſuch Uncertainty, and ſuch Monſtrous Inconſiſtence in their Lives, that one can hardly ſay which is more ſtrange, that they ſhould come ſo near Truth, or that they ſhould miſs of it at laſt; that their Examples ſhould ſpeak them almoſt more than Men, in Some Actions; and yet little, if at all, better than Brutes, in Others.

When Matters ſtood thus, as to Ignorance, and Error, the Metaphor of *Darkneſs* could not be ill ſuited, as it implies a State of Danger, and Diſcomfort, and Fear. The Holy Spirit frequently flies to Bodily Exi-

gencies,

gencies, and Defects, and Diſtreſſes, for giving us a more lively Apprehenſion and tender Concern, in things that cannot fall under the notice of our Senſes. And we deceive ourſelves infinitely, if we ſuppoſe that any of thoſe Reſemblances do, or indeed can, overſtrain the Point, by repreſenting things worſe than really they are. For, how hard ſoever it may be to perſuade Men ſo, yet certain it is, that Blindneſs in our bodily Eyes is a Calamity in no degree comparable, to That in the Eyes of our Mind; And that, of all the Inſtances of Miſery, that attend a miſguided Underſtanding, none is ſo dreadful, none ſo deplorable as that of Men being left in the Dark, or led wrong, in Matters relating to God and Religion. Now the Caſe of theſe Wanderers in the Night, before the Goſpel, was ſuch, as made them ſenſible of being out of the way, but kept them at a loſs how to get into it. The glimmerings of Reaſon unaſſiſted, except with the help of ſome antient Traditions, which had been maimed and mangled by often tranſplanting, ſufficed, to diſcover a mighty depravity in Nature; to fill them with Suſpicions and Fears of what might be hereafter; but at the ſame time that it ſhewed their danger, it neither taught, nor enabled, them to ſhun it. And, what can we form to ourſelves more lamentable, than that Man's miſgiving Circumſtances, who feels and languiſhes under his Diſeaſe, but knows not where to ſeek a Remedy? What more confounding, than a Senſe of Guilt, to one deſtitute of Means, either for Pardon, or Amendment? So very fitly may we apply, to the then wiſeſt of the Heathen World, thoſe Words of our Saviour upon a different Occaſion, *If even the Light that is in thee be Darkneſs, how great*, how very wretched *is that Darkneſs?*

But, praiſed be the Mercy of our God, who took compaſſion upon poor loſt Sinners, and left them not for ever, to periſh in their Miſery and Folly. A moſt comfortable and reviving Account whereof I am now

about to ſet forth, under my *Second* Head, which conſiſts of

II. The Happy Change effected, by the Coming and Manifeſtation of our Bleſſed Saviour: Who is therefore called, *the Light of Men, a Light to lighten the Gentiles*; The Goſpel is called, *His Marvellous Light*; They that believe and obey it, are ſaid, to *walk in the Light*, to *love the Light*, to be *Children of Light*, nay to be *Light*; With ſundry other Expreſſions, that bear exact proportion to the already mentioned Miſeries, from which Men were thus delivered; and denote the very Reverſe of all they felt, or feared, or had been, before.

John i. 4. Luke ii. 32. 1 Pet. ii. 9. John xii. 36. 1 John i. 7. Epheſ. v. 8.

The thick Night of Ignorance, and confounding Miſts of Error, are now perfectly ſcattered; and, in their ſtead, ſucceeds a clear bright Noonday Sun of Knowledge, and Inſtruction in the ways of Righteouſneſs, The Precipices and Snares, removed from all, who take care to avoid them, and all the Rocks, on which unwary Souls were wont to ſplit, are laid bare and levell'd, and a ſtrait, ſmooth, certain way to Heaven diſcovered. So that nothing is now left upon Us, more than to direct our Deſires, and Steps, to Happineſs and Salvation. Deſpair and doubtful Fear are quite baniſhed; and chearful Hope, and a mind at Peace with God and its own ſelf, are the joyful Portion of them who ſubmit to its Guidance. A Light ſo diffuſive, and withal ſo ſtrong, that whereas other former Revelations are compared to thoſe feebler aſſiſtances of *Lamps* to Men's Feet, *Lanterns* to their Paths, a *Candle ſhining in a dark place*, and the like: the Goſpel and its Divine Author have their Perfections expreſſed by the *Day-Star*, the *Day-ſpring from on high*, *the Day*, the *Sun of Righteouſneſs*; *A Sun that riſes with healing under his Wings*, and which, like that other Sun in the Firmament, ſheds his Rays ſo far and

Pſal. cxix.

2 Pet. i. 19. Luke i. 29 1 Theſſ. v. 6. Malac. iv. 2.

and wide, that the darkeſt and moſt diſtant Corners of the Earth may feel the chearing Influence, and *there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.*

How theſe ſo forcible Metaphors are juſtified, it may become us (on this Day eſpecially) to obſerve, by deſcending to Particulars, anſwerable to the ſeveral Branches of that Miſery, wherein the Darkneſs of former Ages hath already been ſhewn to conſiſt.

1. As *Firſt*, For Ignorance and Error. This, with regard to the Heathens vicious Lives, was diſperſed, by that abhorrence of Evil, and ſevere Purity of Heart and Life, enjoined in the Goſpel. Which preſſes all thoſe chaſte and virtuous Affections, that tend to the *poſſeſſing our Veſſels in Sanctification and Honour.* All that watchful care, and ſtrict guard over ourſelves, which may ſubdue the ſenſual Appetite, preſerve the Obedience of the Fleſh to the Spirit, and keep Body and Spirit both, in conſtant reſignation to the Will of God: All that Meekneſs and Modeſty, that Juſtice and Charity, which ſecure our Duty to Others, and cut off the Pride and Covetouſneſs, the Envy and Ambition, and every other unruly Luſt, whereby Society ſuffers, whereby Humanity and good Nature is checked and diſuſed to Men in general, or thoſe mutual Duties are neglected, which ariſe from the different Relations and Capacities of Men in particular.

The old Idolatry and Superſtition is quite extirpated, by giving Men rational, and conſiſtent, and worthy Notions of God. Inſomuch that all thoſe Difficulties vaniſh, in which the wiſeſt heretofore were entangled, concerning the Nature, the Providence, the Power, the Juſtice and Wiſdom of God; the Origin and Government of the World; the Immortality of the Soul; the State and Judgment after Death; the Principles of Moral Actions; the Ends to which they ought to be directed; And the Deductions of particular Duties from general Rules. Theſe things are all, ſo fairly repreſented, ſo fully and diſtinctly laid down, in the Doctrine

of *Jeſus Chriſt*, that what before was hid from the moſt Prudent and Expert, is now revealed to Babes. The Men of mean Condition, and ſlender Attainments, may learn and improve here. And what ſome nice conceited People would have us believe to be ſtill wanting, is not a matter of true Religion, and ſober Virtue, but of unprofitable Speculation, and wanton Curioſity.

2. Then for the jealous Fears and ſad Diſcomforts of Darkneſs, This Goſpel is truly Light, with regard to the Covenant of Grace eſtabliſhed by it. A Covenant, that proclaims Satisfaction already made, and Pardon to be obtained, for the Chief of Sinners: that allows for failings, ſtrengthens and helps human Infirmities, changes Men from Enemies and Aliens, to Friends and Children; makes the Bad Good, and aſſiſts the Good to grow every Day Better. And though, our Endeavours ſtill ſtop ſhort of thoſe degrees of Goodneſs, which we wiſh and labour hard to obtain; yet it is our Comfort, and Privilege unſpeakable, that even imperfect, and unſucceſsful, (when ſincere) Attempts will be graciouſly accepted, notwithſtanding ſome Allay of Sin. And that, for the ſake of Him who knew no Sin, of Him who died to take away Sin; and upon Condition of an humble Faith, ſincere Repentance, and ſtedfaſt Perſeverance in Goodneſs, to the beſt of that Power we have.

Thus does the Goſpel of our dear Redeemer provide for the Quiet of our Minds, and lay all that Confuſion and Dread to ſleep, which loads the Spirits of Men, conſcious of their own Guilt, and full of ſad Forebodings, what diſmal Conſequences it may have. It ſettles our Peace with God, by an undoubted Perſuaſion, that his offended Juſtice, not only may be, but actually is, intreated, appeaſed, reconciled; and by rendering this moſt comfortable Truth a fundamental Article of our Religion. It ſecures Eaſe and mutual Enjoyment among Men, by mortifying thoſe Paſſions,

whence Wars and Contentions grow, by raiſing our Hearts to a better World, and inſpiring a juſt Contempt of this; By Rules of the moſt extenſive, moſt generous, moſt forgiving Charity; And by enforcing thoſe Rules with a moſt powerful Example, of the Light of the World, the Son of God himſelf, doing well and ſuffering ill, with Meekneſs unparallel'd, and Patience invincible, and Love unmeaſurable. So abundantly does the Coming and Manifeſtation of this Bleſſed Saviour change the Circumſtances of Mankind, and put a new and chearful Face upon all their Affairs. For, though I have not, cannot form to myſelf, all the Terrors of that once diſmal Darkneſs; and am as far from worthily deſcribing the Beauties, the Comforts, the ineſtimable Advantages, of this heavenly ſaving Light; yet from that Shadow only of the One, and this ſmall Glimpſe of the Other, we are, I hope, very ſeriouſly diſpoſed to conſider that, which indeed requires our moſt careful Conſideration, I mean my

III. *Third* and Laſt Head, The Powerful Influence and Good Effect, which the *Two* former Particulars ought to have. What Affections in our Hearts, What Virtues in our Lives, it is reaſonable they ſhould excite and promote. The influence ought indeed to extend, to every kind of Good Action and Diſpoſition: But among others, theſe that follow ſeem to be ſuch, as we can by no means be excuſed from.

1. The Firſt and moſt Natural Obligation ariſing from hence, is that, of anſwering the deſign of this Feſtival, in unfeigned Thankfulneſs and Praiſe to Almighty God, for ſo great, ſo ſeaſonable, ſo undeſerved a Bleſſing, as that of ſending Light into the World, and giving us leave to be partakers of that Light. A Bleſſing great beyond all Compariſon, whether we reflect upon the Perſon that wrought out this Salvation, the Manner of working it, the Largeneſs and Extent of it, or the Horror and Miſeries it ſaves from. A

Bleſſing moſt ſeaſonable to poor abandoned Men, who had neither the Power, nor ſo much as the Will, to help themſelves. For this is ſure the Extremity of Miſery and Ruin, to be undone, and not ſenſible of the Sadneſs of our Caſe; nay, even to cheriſh, and be fond of, the Miſchief that undoes us. A Bleſſing to be ſure moſt undeſerved. For what could Creatures merit at the Hands of their Creator? What indeed of Vengeance, and utter Deſtruction, had Sinful Creatures not deſerved, at the Hands of a juſt and terrible Judge? *What then was Man that God ſhould thus remember him?* But what was Dark and Depraved, Obſtinate and Rebellious Man, that this *Day-ſpring from on high* ſhould vouchſafe thus to *viſit him?* What ſhall we render for ſuch Benefits? This ſure we ſhall not fail in, the Tribute of our Praiſes, the daily Acknowledgments of that *ineſtimable Love*, expreſſed by *the Father of Mercies in the Redemption of the World, by his Son Jeſus Chriſt.* And therefore when we come before the Throne of Grace with Hearts warmed with the moſt affectionate Zeal, and Tongues full of holy Thanks and Joy; let us remember, that no other Subject ought to raiſe theſe ſo high, that none can in any degree be compared, none is fit to be ſo much as named, with that of *Jeſus Chriſt, both God and Man*, doing and ſuffering ſo much, *for Us miſerable Sinners, who lay in Darkneſs, and in the Shadow of Death, that he might make us the Children of God, and exalt us to everlaſting Life.*

2. *Secondly*, Since true Thankfulneſs conſiſts in converting the Benefit we acknowledge, to the Uſe it was intended to ſerve; It is by no means enough, that we feel, and own, and publiſh, unleſs we add to all theſe a right Improvement of this wonderful Mercy. Hence Chriſtians (with regard to the alluſion of this Day's Service, and this Diſcourſe in particular) are often urged with ſuch Texts as theſe, *Let us caſt away the Works of Darkneſs, and let us put on*

Rom xiii. 12.

the

the Armour of Light. Let us walk honeſtly as in the Day. Ye were ſometimes Darkneſs, but now Ye are Light, walk as Children of Light. Epheſ. v. 8.

Ye are all the Children of Light, and the Children of the Day; we are not of the Night, nor of Darkneſs: Therefore let us not ſleep as do others, but let us watch and be ſober. 1 Theſſ. v. 5, 6. And once more, *This is the Condemnation, that Light is come into the World, and Men loved Darkneſs rather than Light, becauſe their Deeds are evil.* John iii. 19. The true Intent of which, and infinite like Paſſages, in ſhort is this: That the Goſpel requires a Converſation ſuitable to its Doctrine; That Men are bound to improve in Virtue, in proportion as their Knowledge to do well, or the Means of it, improve upon them. That Senſuality, and all manner of Wickedneſs, are perfectly monſtrous, and abſurd, diſhonourable and incongruous to the Religion we profeſs; and that it highly concerns us, not to allow ourſelves in any thing, but what is of a piece with, and may well become, and is ſure to make for the Credit of the Chriſtian Faith: And again, That if Men will not uſe the Opportunities of knowing their Duty, which are now ſo plentifully put into their Hands; The Caſe of ſuch obſtinate People, as will not be taught, as well as Theirs, who live in Contradiction to what they are taught, will be ſure to draw on a heavier Guilt and Puniſhment, than if ſuch Advantages of knowing and doing better, had never been afforded them at all.

Now, that there is, and always was, but too juſt Occaſion, for ſuch Exhortations and ſolemn Warnings as Theſe, our own Reaſon and woful Experience too manifeſtly convince us. For alas! 'tis a Melancholy Truth, that all, who live under the Shine of this Light, do not walk, as Children of Light. But then, as the fact is plain, ſo is it likewiſe very plain, where the Fault does, and where the whole Reflection ought to lie. The Day is ſufficiently clear, and does its proper buſineſs;

ſineſs; but if the Light it brings be not received and uſed, this is no more to its diſparagement, than their ſtumbling at Noon is to the Sun, who, when he ſhines brighteſt, ſhut up their Room, or wink hard againſt him.

Again. The End of this Light is to guide our Feet. But if we refuſe to be guided at all, or abuſe it to the choice of wrong ways; 'tis We only muſt bear the Shame, and every other diſmal Conſequence, of our perverſe Wanderings. And this is what our Saviour calls *the Condemnation*, that, when Men could not complain for want of Light, they were yet ſo abſurd, as to hate the Light, and give the Preference to Darkneſs. And, becauſe this was their Choice, therefore it proved their Ruin. So gracious and bountiful is God, in diſpenſing the means of Salvation; But withal ſo juſt and terrible, in puniſhing the neglect or abuſe of thoſe Means; And therefore ſo diligent ought we to be, to anſwer the purpoſe, and live worthy of his Mercies: So careful, that our Advantages be not one Day produced, as Articles againſt us; nor the very clearneſs of our Light become an occaſion of ſentencing us to Utter and Eternal Darkneſs.

3. *Thirdly.* The Senſe of this Compaſſion to Ourſelves, and to Mankind in general, ſhould inſpire Us with an active Zeal for the good of one another, as we have power and Opportunity of imitating that great Example. Contributing to the better State of our Brethren, in all Reſpects and Capacities, is one of the ſureſt Marks of a Chriſtian indeed. But the ſort of kindneſs, I chiefly aim at recommending upon this occaſion, is a kindneſs, that keeps cloſeſt to our Pattern: The moſt noble and valuable in itſelf, the moſt beneficial to Them upon whom it is beſtowed, and yet, I am ſorry to ſay, the moſt neglected and diſregarded of any other. A becoming tenderneſs, I mean for the Souls of Men, and earneſt Endeavours to make them better and happier. But eſpecially the laying out theſe holy Labours,

bours, upon the Perſons, who ſtand in greateſt need of them. For how apt are Men, even zealous and good in other reſpects, to overlook the mean and unlearned, and to deteſt the notorious and ſcandalous Sinners, while they apply themſelves chiefly to the Men of more Underſtanding and Virtue? Yet ſo did not our Lord, and his Goſpel, take their Meaſures. They ſtoop'd down to People at the loweſt Ebb of Knowledge and Fortune; and, with more remarkable Diligence and Importunity, addreſs'd to the Illiterate and Vulgar, the Wandering and the Loſt, the Lame and the Blind, the Publicans and the Harlots, the Gentiles and Profane. And We, in like manner, ſhould conſider the unhappy Circumſtances of ill Men, as a more powerful Argument to a greater Degree of Charity. We muſt not diſdain the moſt Ignorant and Miſtaken, nor give over the moſt Profligate and Perverſe. And if, as too often happens, the One will not receive our Inſtruction, nor the Other endure our Reproof; yet even then, we muſt pity, and pray for them ſtill. And, the worſe we find their Condition, the more intractable their Diſpoſitions, the more vehemently muſt we ſtrive with God on their Behalf: that he would ſoften their Hearts, and ſhew them their Errors, and bring them firſt to a teachable Temper, and then into the Ways of Holineſs and Truth.

4. *Fourthly*, This Light, ſo liberally ſhed abroad, by the Coming and Manifeſtation of our Bleſſed Saviour, ſhould ſtir up in every Man ſtrong Deſires, to ſee as much of it as he can. Every one hath not, cannot have, an equal ſhare of this Light; becauſe every one is not equally prepared to receive it. But, in regard it offers itſelf to All, and the neceſſary Doctrines of it may be known by All; it muſt needs be great Unthankfulneſs to God, great Wrong to ourſelves, not to love, and covet, and diligently enquire after, it. And therefore Men ſhould make it a mighty Point of Conſcience, not to abſent themſelves unneceſſarily from the Ordinances of God, or the Times and Places of Publick Worſhip, where the Word

Word is read and explained, the Sacraments duly administered, and many ſingular Helps to Salvation offered to Men's Acceptance. They ſhould likewiſe, when preſent there, be exceeding attentive, careful to remember, to recollect, to apply, to practiſe, what they hear. To theſe Publick, they ſhould alſo add thoſe private Means, of frequent Reading, pious Meditation, and fervent Prayer. The gentler Sentence upon Him who knew not his Maſter's Will, and therefore did it not, belongs to ſuch Servants only, as would have known it, if they could; and would have done it, if they had known it. But a double Woe will be Their Portion, who might have known it, and would not; nay, who, for that very Reaſon, would not know it, that they might have the better Pretence not to do it.

5. *Fifthly*, Since the Apoſtle here obſerves, that the Gentiles, by being called to the Light of the Goſpel, were united in one Body; I cannot but conjure every Chriſtian, to take occaſion from hence of examining very ſtrictly, whether this Light have had that proper Effect upon him which ſuch an Union with God, and all his Fellow Chriſtians, is deſigned to ſuggeſt to us. Whether the conſtant Tenor of his Actions be That, which may ſecure him Peace with God, and tends to promote Unity and Charity among Men. For if this clearer Knowledge do not produce Piety and Devotion, Purity of Life, Chaſtity, Sobriety, Temperance, and the Conqueſt of his Luſts and Paſſions: If the Religion he profeſſes, be not an effectual Bond of Order and Love; If it be made a Maſk to cover Diſobedience, or Faction, or Schiſm; If it put forth in Pride or Envy, in Spite or Uncharitableneſs: If he, in wicked Zeal, ſow Strife and Diſcord, and think to ſanctify Diviſion and Miſchief, in Church, or State, or private Families: This Man, whatever vain Boaſts of Light he may make, is ſtill in Darkneſs, and abideth in Darkneſs. For the only Evidence of our being in the Light of *Jeſus*, is that of *walking in the Light*,

Ver. 6.

1 John i. 7.

Light, as he is in the Light; reflecting back again the Luſtre of his Rays, and taking care to make *our Light ſo Shine before Men*, that they may glorify the Giver of it, that *Father of Lights, which is in Heaven.* Matth. v. 16. James i. 17.

Such are the Conſiderations, ſuch the Improvements, which the Portion of Scripture now in hand, and the Honours due to this Day, ſuggeſt very naturally to us. By making a right Uſe of Theſe, we ſhall celebrate our Lord's *Epiphany* indeed. A Feſtival, which, ſcarce in any Age, called for a more devout ſolemnizing, than now. When, by a Degeneracy peculiar to theſe Dregs of Time, a Set of Chriſtians, falſely ſo called, though to their Shame baptized and educated in the Faith, do yet with Boldneſs leſſen, and detract from, the ineſtimable Benefits we have been contemplating; nay, even turn Advocates for, and would gladly reduce us to, the Conduct of Reaſon and Natural Religion. Ungrateful Men! Who, if they judge more juſtly, or live more regularly, upon the Meaſures of True or Falſe, of Good or Evil, than thoſe Great Names heretofore (who were, I hope, at leaſt their Equals, in all the Advantages Nature, and Induſtry, and good Senſe, could give) are beholden for it to This very Light, which they labour, in Requital, to diminiſh the Neceſſity and Uſefulneſs of. But ſure we have not ſo learned Chriſt, as to quit his *unſearchable Riches*, for ſo wretched a voluntary Poverty. No, Let us rather, by the Honours paid this Day, teſtify to the World our grateful Senſe of the Mercies it commemorates; and thus declare, how little we think ourſelves obliged by thoſe, who, under the falſe Name of Freedom, would bring us again into the Slavery of Darkneſs. A Rule of Belief and Manners, whoſe Defects they, no doubt, are equally ſenſible of; and give us too juſt Cauſe to ſuſpect, that, while they bend their Forces againſt Revealed, their real Deſign is to ſubvert All, Religion. As knowing, that if the Former be once given up; the Natural, for which they now profeſs ſo heartily

to contend, cannot long ſtand its Ground. And therefore we can never ſufficiently praiſe, admire, and adore, the Goodneſs of our God; who hath not put us upon the Foot the *Jews* were formerly, but, without the Diſcipline of their Legal Yoke, hath commanded Day to break in upon us at once; revealed the Myſteries, that thus only could be known; directed us in the way acceptable to himſelf, and hath given *us Boldneſs and Acceſs with Confidence by the Faith of Jeſus Chriſt*. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, Three Perſons and One God, be by Us, and all Mankind, aſcribed Honour and Glory, Adoration and Thankſgiving, henceforth and for evermore. *Amen*.

The GOSPEL.

PARAPHRASE.

St. Matth. ii. 1.

1, 2. Shortly after the Birth of Jeſus, in *Bethlehem* of the Tribe of *Judah*, while *Herod*, who was by Birth an *Idumæan*, ruled the *Jews* (and conſequently at the Time agreeing with *Jacob*'s Prophecy, *Gen.* xlix. 10.) there came out of the Eaſt Country Wiſemen, enquiring what was the Place in which the Meſſiah was to be born. This Journey they had been moved to by the Appearance of an extraordinary Star, which they underſtood to be an Indication of this eminent Perſon's Birth; and therefore they travelled to *Jeruſalem* by its Direction, expecting there to be informed, where they were to pay their Adoration to him.

1. *When Jeſus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa, in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wiſe men from the Eaſt to Jeruſalem,*

2. *Saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews? for we have ſeen his ſtar in the Eaſt, and are come to worſhip him.*

3. This put *Herod* and all the People of that City into a general Conſternation.

3. *When Herod the king heard theſe things, he was troubled, and all Jeruſalem with him.*

4. He therefore ſummoned all the Learned Expounders of the Law

4. *And when he had gathered all the chief Prieſts and Scribes of the People together, he demanded of them where Chriſt ſhould be born.*

and

and the Prophets, requiring them to ſay, what Place was determined for the Birth of Chriſt.

5. *And they ſaid unto him, In Bethlehem of Judæa: for thus it is written by the Prophet,*
6. *And thou Bethlehem in the land of Juda, are not the leaſt among the Princes of Juda: for out of thee ſhall come a governor, that ſhall rule my people Iſrael.*

5, 6. They without great Difficulty, pitch upon *Bethlehem* in the Tribe of *Judah*; and ground this Reſolution upon a Prophecy of *Micah*, wherein it is declared, that this City, however ſmall and inconſiderable in itſelf, ſhould yet be in great Renown, for the Birth of the Meſſiah.

7. *Then Herod, when he had privily called the wiſemen, enquired of them diligently what time the ſtar appeared:*
8. *And he ſent them to Bethlehem, and ſaid, Go and ſearch diligently for the young child, and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worſhip him alſo.*

7, 8. This Anſwer *Herod* imparted to the Wiſemen; and, after particular Examination, about the Time when they firſt ſaw this Star, and a ſtrict Charge to come back and inform him where this Child was to be found (under Colour of intending him the ſame reſpects himſelf) he diſmiſs'd them to the Place determined by the Chief Prieſts and Scribes.

9. *And when they had heard the King, they departed; and lo the ſtar which they ſaw in the Eaſt, went before them, till it came and ſtood over where the young child was.*

9. Having received the King's Commands, they proceeded on their Journey. And, to confirm the Intelligence they received at *Jeruſalem*, to encourage their Faith and Zeal, and to direct their Travels, God was pleaſed, not only to ſhew them the Star again, which occaſioned their ſetting out from home at firſt; but to cauſe it to move directly to, and then to ſtop directly at, the Place, where the Child was.

10. *And when they ſaw the ſtar, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.*

10. This revived their Spirits, and ſatisfied them that God approved, and would proſper their Journey.

11. *And when they were come into the houſe, they ſaw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worſhipped him: and when they had opened their treaſures, they preſented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincenſe, and myrrh.*

11. Arriving at the Place, they found Jeſus and his Mother in mean and humble manner, without

without Pomp or Attendance. Yet did not this unkindly Appearance divert their intended Reſpects. But, according to the Manner of the Eaſtern Countries, they came before him with Proſtrations, made him a Preſent of ſuch things, as with Them were reputed of Value, and fit to expreſs their Reverence for him.

12. This being done, when they were about to return, God (who

12. *And being warned of God in a Dream, that they ſhould not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.*

ſaw the Hypocriſy and malicious Deſigns of *Herod*, and that his Pretence of Worſhipping, was a Cloak to the Intention of Killing, this Child) by a particular Intimation, diverted them from their Purpoſe of carrying back Word to *Jeruſalem*, where this Child was to be found, as the King had commanded them. And ſo they went Home a different Way, from that, by which they came.

COMMENT.

IT was not fit, that a Saviour, born for the Benefit of All, ſhould be known only to a Few. And therefore the humble Circumſtances, which obſcured his ſetting out, gave occaſion for making a Diſcovery more noble and ſurpriſing. Had he made his Entry, with a Pomp at all ſuitable to his Greatneſs, Curioſity and common Fame had ſoon ſpread the News. But a ſmall City and a poor Cottage, a Stable and a Manger, attract no Eyes, employ no Tongues. But what Obſervation and Report did not, a Star ſoon publiſhed to remote People, and Strangers haſtened to pay their Devotions to this Divine Babe. The length of their Journey, the eagerneſs of their Zeal, the anxious Concern to find him, the Reverence paid him, when found, are Incidents too remarkable, to be paſſed over, either by the Evangeliſt, without mention in his Story; Or, by the Church, without the Solemnity of a Feſtival. For, in theſe Perſons, We alſo have an Intereſt. They were the Types, the early Figures, the happy Firſt Fruits of Us Gentiles, who have

ſince

ſince had the *Glory* of this *Day-ſtar from on High, ſhining* in our reſpective Countries alſo; and, with ſo vaſt Numbers, and amazing Succeſs, came into *the Brightneſs of his Riſing*.

What I have to offer upon this Occaſion will be compriſed under Three Heads.

I. The *Firſt* concerns Theſe Perſons and the Star, under whoſe Conduct they came to Chriſt.

II. In the *Second*, I ſhall conſider the particular Method, made choice of for bringing them to the Knowledge of him.

III. And under the *Laſt*, I will make ſome Obſervations upon their Behaviour in this Affair.

I. The *Firſt* Thing, neceſſary upon this Occaſion, is, to give ſome ſhort Account of theſe Travellers, What they were, and whence they came. The *Greek* Word, literally rendered, is *Magicians*. Which, however now, ſpeaking an ill Character, was yet heretofore a Name of very innocent, nay honourable, Signification. The Studious and Inquiſitive, whoſe Buſineſs and Profeſſion led them to ſearch into Nature, its more Abſtruſe Cauſes and Effects, and more particularly into the Motions and Diſpoſitions of the Heavenly Bodies, were diſtinguiſhed by this Title. In what Veneration and profound reſpect they were held, appears, from the moſt important Matters, both Sacred and Civil, being committed to their Adminiſtration. They were the Counſellors, the Judges, the Prieſts, the Princes, in a Word, the Oracles, of the Eaſtern Countries.

But, As the beſt Arts are ſometimes perverted to ill Purpoſes, ſo it happened that Theſe were in Proceſs of Time; by corrupting thoſe noble Speculations of the Heavens, with pretended Prognoſtications and Charms, and a Thouſand idle and wicked Superſtitions. Thus falling into ill Hands, who met with People credulous and ignorant, not only eaſy, but even glad

to be deluded, they degenerated into the Cheats of Judiciary Aſtrology. And theſe Abuſes grew ſo general, as at laſt to fix an ill Senſe upon the Word, and a Scandal upon the Science itſelf. It were a Wrong, and great Indignity, to the Perſons now before us, not to believe them of the nobler and better ſort. Of which ours, and ſome other, Tranſlators of the Bible have been ſo ſenſible, as very prudently to decline the odious Name of *Magicians*, and to call them *Wiſemen*, from the *Eaſt*.

But what and where this Eaſt was, is a Queſtion, upon which Interpreters have been much divided. Some have conceived them to have come out of *Perſia*, Others from *Chaldea*, Others from *Arabia Felix*, and Others again from *Meſopotamia*. Theſe all lay Eaſtward from *Jeruſalem* and the Holy Land, which is the common way of aſſigning any Quarter, in *Jewiſh* Writers. In each of theſe, ſome antecedent Notions of a Meſſiah may be accounted for. In *Chaldea* and *Perſia*, by the Captivity of the *Jews*, and the Book of *Daniel*; In *Arabia*, by the nearneſs of their neighbourhood and frequent Commerce; In *Meſopotamia*, not only theſe, but an eminent Prophecy of, that Country-man, *Balaam*, might furniſh them, who foretold the *Meſſiah*, in the quality of a *Star*. Thus much, at leaſt, each of theſe Opinions hath to ſay for itſelf; and we may fairly leave their reſpective Advocates to diſpute it out: For tho' it be a Point of Learning, it is none of Religion; and, becauſe not neceſſary, the Matter is not great, if it be not poſſible, abſolutely to determine the Controverſy.

Concerning the Star, we meet with ſomewhat better Agreement; for This is generally allowed to be no common One. Its Motion, contrary to the ordinary Courſe, of Stars; Its performing the part of a Guide to theſe Travellers, and that probably by Day, as well as by Night; The accommodating itſelf to their Neceſſities, diſappearing and returning, as they could beſt or leaſt be

be without it: And which is a Circumſtance as remarkable as any of the reſt, the pointing out, and ſtanding over, where this young Child was; (whereas the Height and Diſtance of common Stars muſt needs leave Men in Confuſion, and neither a particular Houſe, nor a City like *Bethlehem*, can be pitched upon for its particular Direction.) Theſe all are Condeſcenſions, out of the Courſe of Nature, and ſuch as require a miraculous Operation. And they have carried St. *Chryſoſtom* yet farther. For he ſuppoſes this, not to have been any real, tho' extraordinary Star, but ſome rational and Heavenly Power aſſuming that Form, like the *Iſraelites* Angel in the Cloudy Pillar. But, however that be, the Hand of God was manifeſt, and his Wiſdom manifeſt in it. Of which that we may be more fully ſatisfied, let us leave theſe Pilgrims at *Bethlehem*, whither this Wonder of a Star conducted them, and turn our Thoughts upon my

Hom. 6. in Matth.

II. *Second* Head, Wherein I propoſe to make ſome Remarks, upon the Method made Choice of, for bringing theſe Perſons to Chriſt. And, becauſe this Action prefigured the Converſion of the Gentile World, to render what I ſhall ſay the more improving, we will carry on, and compare what was done here, to the means uſed for bringing Men to the Bleſſed Jeſus, in a ſaving and ſpiritual Senſe.

1. Now *Firſt*, It was not only exceeding gracious, but exceeding prudent too, in Almighty God, to appoint a Star, for the Signal given to theſe Perſons, of his Son's being born into the World. For Their Studies lying to theſe Heavenly Bodies, above any other ſenſible Part of the Creation, would naturally diſpoſe them to obſerve more heedfully, and be wrought upon more powerfully, by extraordinary Appearances in This, than in any Other Kind. Not but that a Miracle of any ſort had ſufficed, to ſhew the Power and Preſence of Almighty God; but we ſhould greatly deceive

ourſelves, in ſuppoſing, that every Argument of equal Strength, will always approve itſelf of equal Efficacy in the Application.

For Men's Affections and Wills are concerned in their Aſſent, as well as their Underſtanding. And therefore the Solidity and the intrinſick Weight, of the Motives propounded, are greatly forwarded, by ſuch favourable Circumſtances, as make way for their being well received. Now this is never done to better purpoſe, than when an Argument falls in, with the particular Genius and Inclinations, of the Party concerned to attend it. This made a Star more ſuitable to the Wiſemen, than a Viſion, or a Prophecy, or a Voice from Heaven. Thoſe indeed had ſignified the thing in as plain, but This did it in a more acceptable, manner.

And the ſame Method is obſervable, in the ordinary Operations of Grace and the Goſpel. The manifold Inſtructions and Motives for Men's Converſion and Improvement, are admirably accommodated to their Tempers and Employments; to the preſent Exigencies of their Condition, to the received Cuſtoms of their Country; and to thoſe Topicks of Reaſoning, which daily Uſe and ſecular Buſineſs had rendered moſt familiar, and moſt agreeable, to them. Thus we find, our Bleſſed Saviour and his Apoſtles give a mighty addition to the Force and Beauty of their Miracles and their Deportment, their Parables, and their Diſcourſes.

Luke v. When Fiſhermen were to be convinced and gained over to our Lord's more immediate Service; the Wonder, made uſe of for that End, was an extraordinary and unexpected draught of Fiſhes. When vaſt Multitudes who followed him, till they almoſt had fainted by the way, were to be aſſured of his Divine Power; the inſtance choſen to prove it was *feeding five thouſand with five barley loaves, and two ſmall fiſhes.* The toiling all Night to no effect, in that very Place and Ship, prepared the Former of theſe

Matth. xiv.

John vi.

Miracles

Miracles for a ſtronger Impreſſion: And the diſtreſs and hunger of the People rendered the Latter the moſt ſeaſonable Proof of Omnipotence, that, in thoſe Circumſtances, was poſſible to be given.

'Tis upon this Account, that the Proceedings of Almighty God with Mankind, the Succeſſes of his Doctrine, and the State of thoſe that come into it, are ſo often repreſented, by the well-known Similitudes, of ſowing good Seed, of Tares mingled and ſcattered upon that Seed, of ſetting out Vineyards, of pruning and dreſſing Trees, and the like: Becauſe theſe Images were taken from ſuch things, as Men daily converſed with and were employed about.

Hence, when St. *Paul* argues about Chriſtian Liberty, with his Proſelytes at *Rome*, who had moſt of them come over from the Law of *Moſes*; he does it from Principles of *Judaiſm*. But, when treating of the ſame Subject to the *Corinthians*, whoſe Converſation had been Pagan, he turns the Diſcourſe to Idol-Feaſts and Idol-Temples. To the *Jews*, he urges the Teſtimonies of the Prophets, and Types of the Levitical Law: To the *Gentiles*, the common Grounds of Morality, Teſtimonies of Heathen Poets, and frequent Alluſions to the Olympick Games, ſo well underſtood, ſo highly in requeſt among them.

It were endleſs to produce the many Examples of this in Scripture; and eaſy to ſhew, not only, that this is God's uſual Method in the teaching part, as to publick Propoſals of Doctrine; but as to the inward Operations of Grace too, in the Breaſt of each Perſon in particular. For here alſo the ſoft and gentle Method is taken: Such as does not force or drive, but inſinuate, and lead and win Men to Goodneſs. How manifeſtly do we ſee in Virtues, as well as Vices, that they follow, in great meaſure, the different Complexions of Men? And the common way, by which the Spirit of God brings us forward, is by ſtriking in with our ſeveral Humours and Diſpoſitions, and ſo promoting thoſe

good Qualities, to which Nature had put into us a natural aptitude before.

And indeed it is One great Excellence of Religion, to leave Men without conſtraint, in the Uſe of their Faculties: Not violently to over-bear, but ſecretly to incline, them to obedience: As it is Another, to be ſo Copious and full of Perſuaſion, that no Condition of Life, no Conſtitution of Body, no Temper or Turn of Mind, can want Motives ready cut out for, and proper to ſtrike in with, it. The Cold, and Phlegmatick, and Timorous, have Terrors to ſpur them up, and fright them into Duty: The Sanguine, and Bold, and Fiery, have Hopes and Rewards to allure and puſh them on: The Melancholy have Comforts to encourage and ſupport them under their Dejections: And the Good-natured and Generous have Love and Mercy inexpreſſible, to engage their Bounty and Gratitude. In a Word, all Nature, nay all Fortunes, abound with particular Inſtructions, in which they have, as it were, a diſtinct Property of their own.

The Maſters are to conſider, that they have a Maſter in Heaven, and therefore muſt treat their Servants with Juſtice and Humanity. The Servants, that They ſhould ſerve diligently and contentedly, becauſe to be judged by One, who for Their ſakes diſdained not the form of a Servant. The Huſbands muſt be indulgent and entirely affectionate, becauſe Chriſt is ſo to his Spouſe the Church: The Wives Faithful and Obedient, becauſe the Church maintains her Amity and Union with her dear Lord in Heaven upon no other Terms. The Fathers are to imitate the Tenderneſs of their Heavenly Father, and Children the meek Submiſſion of the Son of God. The Huſbandman hath his Saviour, that Spiritual Sower, before his Eyes; And, from the good or bad conditioned Ground, is led to obſerve the Qualities of his own Heart, to correct the Barrenneſs of that Soil, and to take all poſſible care, that the Seed of the Word may bring forth Fruit abundantly. The

Merchant

Merchant is naturally carried to meditate on that Pearl of great Price, in the purchaſe whereof all that he poſſeſſes were well and wiſely laid out. And the Mariner, from rough Seas and foul Weather, is loudly called upon to make that Port, where the Souls of good Men are laid up, at reſt from the Billows of a tempeſtuous World, and paſt danger of ſuffering Shipwreck any more.

Thus every Man might ſingle out ſomething, in his own Conſtitution, and Station, and Buſineſs, to put him in remembrance of greater, and better things. Something, which well attended to, would not fail to prove, like this Star to the Wiſemen, and certainly bring him to Chriſt. For, the more familiar any Motive is to us, and the oftener it returns upon our Thoughts, the more pleaſingly will it be entertained, and have the more prevailing Influence over us.

My deſign therefore, in enlarging upon this Obſervation, is to perſuade Men, that they would ſtudy themſelves very thoroughly; get well acquainted with the Temperament of their Bodies, the Bent of their Affections, the Condition of their Fortunes, the Nature of their Callings, the ſeveral Relations and Capacities they ſtand in to each other. And then, that they would preſs upon their Minds ſuch Motives to Holineſs and Virtue more eſpecially, as are beſt ſuited, and come cloſeſt up, to their preſent Circumſtances. For, tho' no ſort of Perſuaſions can be improper; yet thoſe are always beſt and moſt proper, which are neareſt home, apply themſelves moſt naturally and ſeaſonably, and affect us moſt ſenſibly. And the true Reaſon, I take it, why Religion gets no more ground in the World, is not, becauſe it wants Arguments ſufficient to make Men better; but becauſe Men are wanting to themſelves in a prudent, and ſeaſonable, and frequent Application of the Arguments provided, and always ready at hand. And it muſt needs be a mighty Advantage thoſe Men have, who have ſo fixed their Thoughts, and fitted Reaſons

to their own Caſe; that they cannot diſpatch even their ordinary Affairs, without ſomewhat ſuggeſted continually from thence, which ſhall improve their Souls at the ſame time. This is for *our Converſation* to be in *Heaven* indeed; and, in the beſt and moſt Spiritual importance of the Words, to *live, and move, and have our Being in God.*

2. The next thing I obſerve on this Occaſion, is what moſt Interpreters conſent in, and ſeems naturally enough collected, from the Evangeliſt's Account of the Matter, The diſappearing of the Star, during the ſtay of the Wiſemen at *Jeruſalem*. For both the Particle *lo!* at the *Ninth* Verſe, and the exceeding greatneſs of their Joy at the *Tenth*, ſeem to denote the return of a Bleſſing, which had for ſome time been withdrawn from them. And the Reaſon of this is, probably, that it had ſo far done its buſineſs, and put them now into the Hands of other Guides. Their deſign was to worſhip the New-born *King of the Jews*. And his Birth was a Subject, of Concernment ſo vaſt, and Expectation ſo general; as to fill the Minds and Mouths of all the Prophets, and leave no material Circumſtance, relating to it, unforetold long ago. Arriving therefore at *Jeruſalem*, they were in the ready way of regular Information. And accordingly, by the Interpoſition of *Herod*'s Authority, they quickly learnt, from the unanimous Voice of the Scribes and Chief Prieſts, what Place God had ordained, to have the Honour of giving Birth to his Son. That Reſolution they make no Difficulty to depend upon, and direct their Courſe to *Bethlehem* accordingly. Now this Circumſtance ſuggeſts a very uſeful Reflection, upon God's uſual manner of bringing Souls to Chriſt; and our Duty with regard to it.

My meaning is, That extraordinary means of Converſion and Salvation are not uſually afforded, where the Ordinary may be had, and will ſuffice for our purpoſe. So that our Buſineſs muſt be, to take up with, and make our beſt of, Theſe; without preſuming upon,

or

or waiting for ſuch, as tho' they may perhaps be more powerful, are not however neceſſary for our Condition. We have very good grounds to believe, that God denies no Man the Abilities and Opportunities proper for him; but then this proceeds upon a Suppoſal, that every one be careful to improve ſuch as are allowed him. And, as no body will be called to anſwer for any thing abſolutely out of his Power; So no branch of our Account is like to lie heaver againſt us, than that wherein our Conſciences reproach us, with the Good we ſhould and might have done, but did not, would not, do it.

Were this point juſtly conſidered, we ſhould ſoon ſee an end put to many dangerous Errors, both in Opinion and Practice. The Boaſts of modern Miracles, Of an infallible Judge, And all Enthuſiaſtick Pretenſions to the Spirit would fall to the Ground. Becauſe we ſhould ſee the mighty difference, between a Faith yet to be propagated; and one already eſtabliſhed: Between a perfect Canon and ſure Record of Scripture; and an Age that had it not: Between a ſettled Church, with a regular Miniſtry; and a Seaſon of Signs and Wonders, with immediate Inſpiration: Between the common Aſſiſtances of Grace, which, attended by theſe Advantages, are ſufficient; and the more powerful Illuminations, which, without Theſe, are no more than neceſſary. Men would not make the want of ſudden Calls a pretence for Spiritual Sloth, nor Delay for a Voice from Heaven, when the written Word tells them as plainly now, as that Voice did St. *Paul* heretofore, what it is, the Lord would have them to do.

In ſhort, while we are at a diſtance from *Jeruſalem*, *a Star* may be requiſite; But when we are come thither, the Prieſts, and the Prophecies, will inform us, where Chriſt is to be found. That is, When we are not in the way of ordinary Methods, God will provide himſelf and us with others; but ſo long as we can come at theſe, we are to uſe them thankfully, and reſt contented. A conſcientious Attendance upon God's Holy Word

and

and Sacraments, ſeconded by our own ſincere Endeavours, and the conſtant Influences of his Grace, (which will be conſtant in its Help, if we be ſo in our Duty) will compaſs as much, as is required from us. All ſorts of Circumſtances have their peculiar Advantages, and all have enough for their reſpective Ends. So that, if all be not furniſhed alike, it is, becauſe the Wiſe Manager, tho' he be liberal, will not be profuſe. He therefore alters his Methods, as he ſees Cauſe; and, according as the difference of Men, and Times, and Places, calls for a different ſort of Adminiſtration. But ſtill he is not only Wiſe, but Good and Gracious in every one; for I take notice.

3. *Thirdly*, That, upon theſe Perſons leaving *Jeruſalem*, the Guidance of the ſame Star was reſtored to them. In this St. *Matthew* is expreſs. And God ſeems thus to have ordered the Matter, for prevention of any Diſcouragement they might otherwiſe have received, from the coldneſs and neglect of the *Jews*, upon this Occaſion. That People, ſtartled at the News they brought, received it only as a Matter of Surprize; but expreſſed no degree of Solicitude, like theſe Strangers, to find out, and pay due Homage to, their own King. It came alſo ſeaſonably to ſatisfy theſe Travellers, that God went along with them ſtill; and, that the Infant they ſought, was by no means leſs adorable and Divine, than they truly apprehended at their firſt ſetting out; Notwithſtanding the poor and humble Figure, they were about to ſee Him, and his Mother, make at *Bethlehem*.

Now the Inference from hence I take to be very natural and plain, That, tho' common Methods of Conviction and Grace will anſwer all the Excellencies of common Caſes, and we are not excuſable, when complaining for lack of more: Yet, where a Caſe is really extraordinary and uncommon, God will not leave us deſtitute of Aſſiſtances proportionable to it. What Meaſures are proper at any time, Ourſelves are not competent

competent Judges. But thus much is certain, that no Man hath a good Claim to Addition and Increaſe, who hath not dealt faithfully, and made the moſt of the Meaſure he hath already received. Let us not therefore faint, or diſtruſt our *Father in Heaven*; who is always bountiful and kind, tho' bountful upon Conditions, and kind with Wiſdom. We cannot promiſe ourſelves Variety and Abundance; but we may depend upon our daily Bread: that Bread, I mean, which nouriſhes to Life everlaſting. St. *Paul*, when told, that *God's Grace was ſufficient for him*, underſtood by this, not only, that it would ſuffice for his preſent difficulties, but for any worſe, when any worſe ſhould come. And if We do, like Him, ſtrive and pray earneſtly; we ſhall not fail of relief in time of need.

All Sacred Hiſtory informs us, how largely God hath provided for convincing the Minds of reaſonable Men. So that They, who have not been yet perſuaded, continue ignorant and unbelieving, becauſe they will not hearken to any reaſonable Perſuaſion. Now the ſame Care, that hath been taken for eſtabliſhing the Truth, hath been likewiſe taken for inviting Men to Virtue, and for gaining upon their Affection, as well as upon their Judgments. The living well is of as great Importance, as believing rightly; and it is God, who enables us to do both; and in Both Caſes affords extraordinary Aſſiſtances, when the Occaſion requires ſuch. For a Good Man that does his utmoſt, may ſafely apply to himſelf in every kind of Trial, what the Apoſtle ſpeaks of Troubles in particular; that *God is faithful, who will not ſuffer him to be tempted above that he is able, but will with the Temptation alſo make a way to eſcape, that he may be able to bear it.* To bear it? yea to encounter, and conquer, and triumph over it. 2 Cor. x. 13.

Such were the Methods in favour of the Wiſemen. Such in proportion are they on our behalf. Let it be our

our Care in the mean while to preſerve as near a likeneſs in the

III. *Third* and *Laſt* Head: Where I ſhall make a Remark or Two on their Behaviour, upon this Occaſion. And here I will content myſelf, earneſtly to exhort, that they may be our Patterns, (ſo far as the Caſes will bear Imitation.) *Firſt*, In their Zeal, conſpicuous at the beginning, and through the whole progreſs of their Journey; And, *Secondly*, In their Joy and Satisfaction at the End of it.

1. The Former of Theſe is manifeſt, from divers paſſages in this Relation of the thing. To leave their own Dwellings upon the ſingle warning of an unuſual Star; To continue their Travels in ſearch of a new King, and, with a Courage ſo undaunted, to carry the unwelcome News of a ſuſpected Rival, to the capital City and Court of a Jealous Tyrant; already infamous for Blood: To comply ſo readily with the Voice of the *Sanhedrim*, and perſiſt in their Purpoſe, notwithſtanding the Conſternation of Some, and the Indifference of Others, in a matter wherein all were ſo deeply concern'd: Theſe are qualities very remarkable in them. And they are ſo many Prefigurations of thoſe *Gentiles*, whoſe Converſion their Succeſs, and this Journey, repreſented. For ſuch were Their Diſadvantages too, in compariſon of the Privileges and Preparations to Chriſtianity, which the *Jews* enjoy'd above them. Such was their early Zeal to a new and altogether ſtrange Doctrine, which broke in upon them at once: So juſt a Reproach to Them, whom neither former Revelations, nor ancient Prophecies, nor infinite Diſcourſes, nor unblemiſhed Examples, nor Miracles confeſſed to be Divine, could win over to the Truth.

Now if We do in good earneſt deſire to imitate either theſe Wiſemen, or thoſe *Gentiles*; it muſt be our care to keep our Ears open, and our Hearts teachable. We muſt not only ſee, but follow, and embrace moſt gladly,

gladly, the Light that ſhines upon us from above, and is let down from Heaven for a Guide to us; Comply chearfully with every Call and Motion of his Good Spirit; Provoke, and, if poſſible, ſhame thoſe into a noble and holy Emulation, who ſhut their Eyes againſt it. We muſt not ſuffer ourſelves to be diſcouraged, by any Hardſhips or Dangers, which our duty calls us to: nor grow cold upon the many ill Examples, we converſe among; the general neglect of Moſt, and the bold Affronts of Some who make it an act of Gallantry, to inſult, and caſt all the Contempt they can upon Religion: In a word, we muſt perſevere in Piety and Virtue, though we were left to ſtand alone. And, in deſpight of all opprobrious Treatment, which They or We may meet, from Perſons, who might and ſhould know better, and in truth do not ſee, only becauſe they will not. Of all this our Saviour hath ſhewed us the Neceſſity, by declaring that Men *cannot believe*, while they prefer popular Eſteem before a good Conſcience. Which is, in Scripture Language, *receiving honour one of another, not ſeeking that Honour which cometh from God only, and loving the Praiſe of Men more than the Praiſe of God.* John v. 44. xii. 43.

2. The *Laſt* thing I obſerve, is, The mighty Satiſfaction theſe Wiſemen felt, at the return of the Star. *When they ſaw the Star* again, ſays the Evangeliſt, *they rejoiced with exceeding great Joy.* A Joy, that ſprung no doubt, from ſtrong Aſſurances, that this was a Token, of their Journey being well-pleaſing to God: And, that he would proſper it to their intended Purpoſe, of ſeeing and adoring that wonderful Infant, whoſe this Star was. And here again they are a Pattern, which We ſhould be infinitely to blame, not to copy after.

For, as the Apoſtle upon all Occaſions urges, we are certainly of all Creatures the moſt ungrateful and ſtupid, the moſt unworthy of our Happineſs, if we do

do not eſteem the Converſion of the Gentile World, to be one of the moſt glorious Myſteries of Providence, that ever was exhibited to Mankind. And our Reſentments of this Mercy ſhould be the more ſenſible and tender; becauſe we are the Offspring of thoſe Gentiles; and our Anceſtors once a part of them, as dark perhaps, as any. 'Tis poſſible indeed, we might not have retained the ancient Rudeneſs and Ferity of our Country. From That our Invaders would have ſoon delivered us. But, alas! How poor a Conſideration is it to Chriſtians, that they have been refined into Civility and Good Manners, taught Arts and Commerce, and improved in Induſtry and Learning? Allow theſe Advantages the great Value and Commendation really due to them; Yet ſtill, I ſay, how little and inſignificant are even all theſe Poliſhings, in compariſon of thoſe Benefits which come from the Knowledge, the Obedience, the Hopes, and precious Promiſes of the Goſpel? The exalting our Minds with this moſt Holy Faith, enlarging our Ideas of God, giving us a Proſpect of Heaven, ſeaſoning us with a true Taſte of Good and Evil, and forming our Lives upon the moſt perfect Model of Juſtice, and Holineſs, and Order, and Peace, and all that can procure or preſerve the Tranquillity and Happineſs of ourſelves, and the whole World: This was, in a literal Senſe, to bring Light out of Darkneſs; and (praiſed be God) no part of his Church is bleſs'd with clearer and purer Day, than Ours. This is our Glory, This ought to be our Joy.

Since then, We alſo are, with theſe Eaſtern Forerunners, happily conducted to Chriſt; Let Us, as They did, fall down and worſhip Him. We ſee Him not indeed, like Them, in Arms and Infancy; But, which is at once a Tragical, and yet moſt Comfortable Proſpect, dying upon a Croſs for us; nay, riſen again, gone up on high, ſhedding his Gifts and Graces down, and perpetually at the Right Hand of God, making Interceſſion for Us. Let us then approach with Reverence,

verence, and open our Treaſures too; Let us preſent him, not with Gold or Spices, but ſomewhat, more becoming Him to receive, and Us to offer; Even our Bodies, and Souls, and Spirits. Theſe, though of little Value in themſelves, will yet be accounted a rich and fragrant, if they be but an humble, and an Holy, Sacrifice. The only effectual Sacrifice of Thankſgiving; and an Oblation, which cannot more pleaſe Him, than it will profit Us. For, by ſuch a *reaſonable Service*, by ſuch undiſſembled Teſtimonies of Praiſe and Gladneſs it is, That we muſt hope, God will be inclined to accept and anſwer the proper Petition of this Feſtival; even that He, *who by the leading of a Star did manifeſt his only begotten Son to the Gentiles, would mercifully grant, that We, which know him now by Faith, may after this Life have the Fruition of his glorious Godhead, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.* Amen.

F I N I S.